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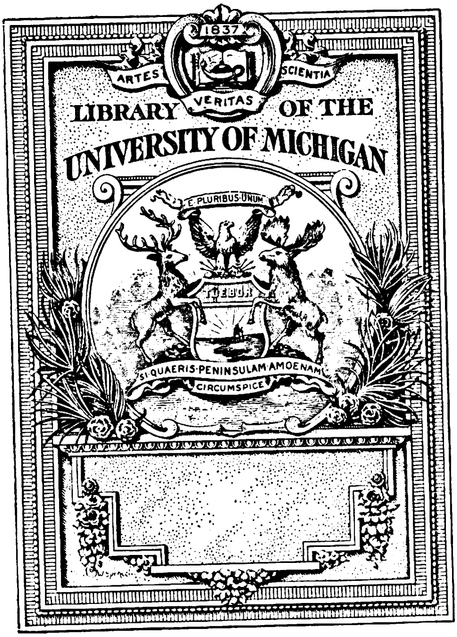
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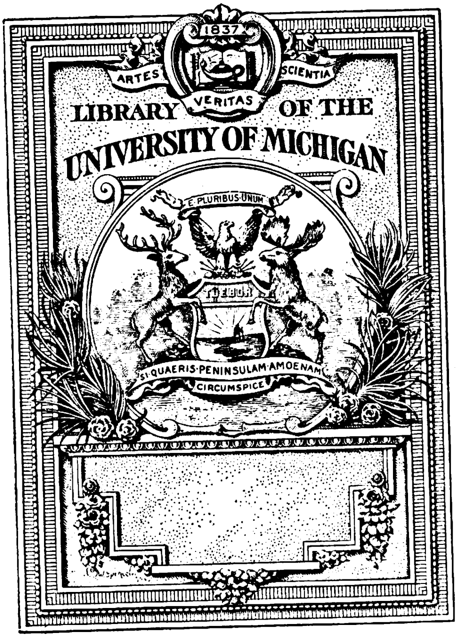

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THE CHRONICLES
OF BREAK O' DAY

dward

BY

E. EVERETT HOWE

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DEDICATION.

My readers who are familiar with the traditions preserved in this history know one woman who is beloved by rich and poor, a comforter of the afflicted, a friend of the friendless, a mother of the motherless, in prosperity without arrogance, in sorrow without complaint. To Mrs. Fidelia Gibbins, whose character suggested the Mrs. Boyle of my story, this volume is respectfully dedicated.

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THE CHRONICLES OF BREAK O' DAY.

CHAPTER I.

A RURAL PHILOSOPHER.

For a territory containing no high mountain system, Michigan has a varied geography. In contrast to the sterile hills and grand, pictured rocks of the northern peninsula, the productive farms in the southern part of the state form an area of fertility unbroken save by a few patches of sand and some irregular strips of swamp. The largest and most remarkable of these swamps passes from north to south through Ingham and Jackson counties, extending beyond the borders of Shiawassee and Lenawee.

This marshy territory is covered by a motley growth of willows, huckleberries, spruce, tamaracks and a few pines, in places so thin as to afford no inconvenience to a footman, in other places so thick as to be almost inaccessible. Horse-thieves, escaped convicts, and deserters from the army, have successively sought its seclusion; and never has the asylum betrayed the confidence of one who trusted in its hospitality.

On the western side of the swampy belt lay a farm, which, according to the census of 1870, shared, with but four others in the State, the distinction of containing one thousand acres.

The owner of this piece of property for many years was Major Ratke, an officer of the Mexican war. He was ambitious of acquiring distinction as a philosopher, both in his neighborhood and throughout the world. He was especially desirous of becoming famous as a great inventor, and to this end he had constructed a large quantity of strange machinery. In his inventions he aimed at novelty, and so well did he succeed in this respect that even his bitterest enemies never accused him of a lack of originality.

One March morning in 187—, the major was in the sitting-room of his gothic house working at an abstruse problem in mathematical philosophy, of which he was excessively fond. It was hard, however, for him to give it his undivided attention. Troubles had been gathering about his domain. A mortgage on his estate had been foreclosed, and his hired help, never famed for efficient service, now shirked duty with even more than their usual faithlessness. His widowed sister, Mrs. Grippin, a more acute and vigilant overseer than he, had from the chamber window repeatedly viewed through a telescope the delinquency of two men who were cutting wood on a back lot. Her vehement arraignment did not induce the major to take action upon the matter, till an event occurred which he considered an insult to his dignity as a master. He had sent them to the woods with an ax and an invention of his own, which he termed a "one-man saw," but which his men called, from the labor of running it, the "six-man saw."

Next to the "one-man saw" the ax was the tool most shunned about the farm. Accordingly, as soon as they thought themselves out of sight, the indignant laborers took a half-day's vacation to get some tobacco at the village of Break o' Day, which circumstance procured their immediate discharge.

The major had thought it an easy thing to supply their places. His surmise, however, was incorrect. Of the first three visitors who called at his residence after he put up the sign, "Wanted, two hired men," one was a lightning-rod man, one was a book agent, and the other a tramp, who hired out before breakfast, and after the meal declared that it was cold weather to work and that he would come around to begin when it got warmer.

Notwithstanding the foreclosure of the mortgage the major was planning sundry improvements on his place. A hill and a quagmire opposite to the house were eyesores to his vanity, and he determined to transfer the superfluous gravel of the one to the boggy surface of the other. His first step was nicely to calculate the expense of the undertaking, the only prudence of which he was capable, for expense never stood in the way of his projects. When he had finished a survey of the hill, he applied his mathematics to ascertain its cubical contents, using a confusion of geometrical and surveying terms to which Mrs. Grippin, though protesting, was obliged to listen.

But, as he proceeded in his work, he determined to originate a new method for ascertaining the dimensions of solid bodies; and his inventive instinct prevailed to such an extent that it became greater than his desire to improve his farm.

He declared that he would invent a system of mathematics which should be the basis of calculation for succeeding ages. He formed a small earthen mound to represent as nearly as possible the shape of the hill. He determined to ascertain the weight of the hill by the rule, "Similar bodies are to each other as the cubes of their like dimensions."

As he was giving the miniature mountain a final pat to impart additional depth to a depression on its side, his sister interrupted his study.

"James, there's a man coming."

"Strong hand, is he?" asked the major, drawing his finger carefully down the mound.

"Go and look for yourself," retorted Mrs. Grippin tartly. "I ain't going to wait on you and let you fool with that pile of dirt."

"He is as faithful as the day is long," said the major, going to the window. "I can tell by his gait. See how steadily he walks. He would work at a good jog chopping and keep it up all day. He would cut, let me see, a quarter of a cord an hour. Eight hours a day. That would be two cords."

"I'll bet he's the biggest shirk in four counties," commented Mrs. Grippin sarcastically. "Anybody can tell all about a man by taking him for just the opposite of what you say he is."

Two nieces of Mrs. Grippin and the major now entered from the parlor. The one in advance, Nora Warfle, was fair and vivacious, with eyes over which solemnity rarely drew a curtain thick enough to hide the merriment slumbering within.

She was ever on the alert for the ridiculous and the mirthful, and in her efforts at diversion she was not always scrupulous about wounding the feelings of others.

Her companion, Marion Ratke, who resided permanently at the farm, was a true representative of her father's family. Her height was medium, her form symmetrical, and her hair dark brown. She was somewhat handsome, though she was too intelligent to be really a beauty.

"Here comes a peddler, Manie," whispered Miss Warfle excitedly. "Let's buy something of him and beat him down on everything he sells."

The man had drawn an attention altogether out of proportion to the impressiveness of his personal appearance. A common observer would at once have decided that he had long followed the occupation of peddling. He was of ordinary size and wore ordinary clothes. Strapped together and hanging, one before his breast and one over his back, were two large satchels. They seemed to have crowded down his neck and pushed out his chin until his shoulders were rounded almost to deformity.

The first characteristic act which he performed after passing through the door was to anticipate the offer of a chair by placing himself in one by the fire, as if he had done the same thing in the same place a thousand times before.

"I suppose you've heard the news?" he said, with the air of one who holds a secret and who feels his power.

"I have heard a great many items of news this winter," answered the major.

"Yes, but the news—the late news. You ain't heard about the horse-thieves?"

"Horse-thieves?" echoed Miss Warfle. "Are they around again? Uncle James, you want to lock your barn or they'll be stealing Taylor."

"Yes," continued the man, "they've been at it again. This time they called on, what's his name?—this man that raises horses over here. Queer I can't think."

"Sparks," suggested the major. "Lyman Sparks has the best horses of any man in Jefferson township."

"No, that ain't his name," answered the man, "it's Holmes. That's it, Holmes."

"Oh," said the major. "The best horse Holmes has will not bring more than $300. Sparks has one for which he has been offered $600—Madge T., a very good blooded animal. He thinks she can outstep my Taylor. He did pass me once, but he would not if Taylor had hung to the trot."

"No wonder he breaks up," put in his sister, "the way you train him. Do you know how he does, Nora? He trains his team to run. He'll make them stand stock still still he yells 'Charge,' and if they don't jump the first thing, he thrashes them. Then the next day he'll take Taylor out to trot."

"Mrs. Grippin!" said the major, his voice sounding an octave below his usual speaking key.

"Maybe you can get this gentleman to work, Uncle James," said Miss Ratke, wishing to put an end to the unpleasant controversy.

"Well now, like enough," answered the major. "Do you want a job?"

"I've got one now," said the man, drawing a bottle from one of his satchels.

"I'm going to do humanity all the good I can, sir, all the good I can. I am agent for the Great American Panacea. This medicine is compounded of pine, hemlock, tamarack, cedar and spruce, besides sovereign roots and herbs known to the medical fraternity. It cures cuts, bruises, sprains, wounds, incisions, hurts, proud flesh—"

"What did you say your panicky is made of?" interrupted the fair-haired Miss Warfle.

"Panacea, Miss, panacea," corrected the peddler. "It cures cuts, bruises, sprains, wounds, incisions and all injuries to the flesh. It is also a sovereign remedy for asthma, bronchitis, tonsilitis, laryngitis and all throat diseases, besides being an excellent tonic for consumption, dyspepsia——"

"What is your panicky worth a bottle?" innocently asked Miss Warfle.

"Panacea, Miss, panacea," again corrected the medicine man. "Panicky is in a battle where the men get in a tight place with the rebels coming right onto 'em so they have to run, you know. Then when they get whipped and can't fight any more, they have what they call a panic, you know, or, as you might say, they get panicky. But this is a different thing altogether. Better take a bottle, Mister. It is a sovereign remedy for asthma, bronchitis, tonsilitis, laryngitis——"

"I would like a good liniment for bruises," said the major, "but it is impossible for one remedy to cure so many diseases. If it is prepared for everything, it is pretty sure to cure nothing."

"I ain't so sure about the consumption and the throat diseases," said the agent reflectively. "I thought it would be good for them on account of its healing properties, but it's sure business for bruises."

"Have you a good salve?" asked the major.

"That's just what I've got," responded the man with alacrity, "Derrick's Dough of Life." There's Bill Higgins had a colt that got his leg cut on a scythe. Laid it right open so the hide was left in flaps. Bill says to me, 'Say, Dabney, what'll cure that cut?' and says I, 'I 've got the very thing for that.' Well, he put on the Dough of Life. In two weeks the colt was capering round to beat all. He got into the corn, knocked over a fence, chased the cattle and sheep, and killed two lambs and kicked the hired man on the leg. And I don't know what the hired man would have done if it hadn't been for the panacea."

When the agent had sold a box of the salve he moved toward the back-door and said,

"I guess I'll go down and try your men. Maybe some of them'll want to buy."

"You better wait till noon," said Mrs. Grippin. "Then the men won't have to stop work."

"They never mind that," said the agent. "They was always real good about stopping whenever I come around."

"Of course they'd be willing to stop and gab with him," commented Mrs. Grippin, looking after the retreating agent. "James Ratke, if you had the gumption of a man, you'd kick such loafers off the farm when they come palavering round with an excuse for your lazy hired men to stop work."

" How did he know I had so many hired men?" asked the major.

" How did he know?" repeated his sister. " Ain't he been here half a dozen times before? He comes about every six months, and a nuisance he is, too. Ain't you heard them tell about old Panicky? You're the only man in the country that don't know him."

" Oh, yes," said the major, " I do have some recollection of him; but I was away from home when he made his last two or three visits."

" In the name of mercy," exclaimed Mrs. Grippin, " if there ain't another lightning-rod man."

The young man coming up the walk might have been twenty-eight. The preceding speculation concerning his profession seemed correct, for nothing about him indicated acquaintance with farm labor. His elegant form, his dark hair and eyes and a heavy brown mustache combined with an air of easy grace to make him one of those so rarely met with whom any apparel becomes. Yet, as is usually the case with such individuals, he bestowed more care on his personal appearance than he would have bestowed had nature made such attention more necessary.

The stranger with few preliminaries made an application for work. To this proposal Ratke did not immediately reply. He gave his own name and requested the young man to do likewise.

" My name is Montcalm," said the stranger, with a smile which at once won the major's heart.

" Montcalm," exclaimed the major; " that is the name of one of my comrades in the army."

" My father held the rank of captain in the Mexican war," said Montcalm. " I am the heir to his given name, which was Traceworth."

Instantly the major was shaking him by the hand. " Is he alive? Is he well? Where does he live?" were his ejaculations.

" He died fifteen years ago," answered Montcalm, " at his home in Cortland, New York."

"He was a noble fellow," said the major, "and his sword was one of the best in the brigade. General Taylor, in his official report, made special mention of him for bravery in the battle of Resaca de la Palma. I was by his side during the engagement, and I, like the rest of the men, noticed his impetuosity, though I had little time to watch my comrades. It always seemed as if he ought to have been promoted, but justice is not in every case meted out in this world. Did you ever hear him speak of me?"

"I have heard him mention his comrades in the army, but I have forgotten their names," answered Montcalm. "I was young when he died."

"We first got acquainted in the Black-Hawk war," said the old man. "He was generally good-natured, but he had a terrible temper and was very set in his way. I have suspected that that was one thing which kept him from rising in the service. One night on Wisconsin River, after we had been chasing Black-Hawk all day, the mosquitos were very thick. Some of the boys rolled and tumbled and some swore. As I was exposing first one part of my face and then another, to see if there was not some place the pests had less relish for, I heard a threshing so regular that I knew whoever was making it meant to push hostilities to the last, and when I looked, I saw Trace sitting up and striking as deliberately as he would plan a compaign. But it was a wicked vindictiveness, and when the lieutenant laughed at him, he wanted to fight.

"His set ways came near getting him into trouble once. It was at the last battle in the Wisconsin territory. The Indians had been beaten and were swimming across a slough, bucks, pappooses and squaws all splashing around together. We had orders to fire on them from the bank.

"Trace told me he thought it was a hard sight, and he would fire, but he would take care the bullets did not hit anybody. Most of the Indians were shot down before they got across. One old buck turned back to help a squaw, probably his own, to get her pappoose to shore. Trace and I wanted to have that old fellow get clear; but while we were congratulating ourselves that he stood a little chance, Ben Rogers, right close by, drew a careful bead on him. Now, Ben was the best shot in the regiment, and my heart went down in my boot-heels, but Trace jostled him just as he fired. Well, Ben was mad. He threatened to report, and if he had, Trace might have got court-martialed, but he never did. Trace's jostling did no good, however. The old buck fell, going over the bluff on the other side. How long before dinner, Maria?"

"About three-quarters of an hour," answered Mrs. Grippin with unaccustomed good-nature. "I'll ring the bell when it's time, and I ought to have a load of wood, James."

"All right," responded the major. "Show Trace his room. I must call you Trace on your father's account, for it is a luxury to address his son as I did him. We will make no bargain till after dinner."

After bringing in the wood, Ratke waited a few minutes for Montcalm's appearance. At the end of that period Montcalm came from the bedroom, wearing a suit of plain clothes and a pair of stoga boots. Even this dress did not give him the air of a farmer, which he had evidently sought to assume. His hands, soft and white, indicated that he was unacquainted with muscular toil; and his whole aspect and demeanor, in ways not easily described, pointed to the same conclusion. There was in his address something which was peculiarly winning, and which would have fascinated Ratke without the assistance of the veteran's friendship for his old comrade.

"Why, you have made a farmer of yourself," said the major. "No, you have only tried to. Well, suppose we look around a little before dinner. Go to work now? No, sir, not a stroke do you do till one o'clock;" and, leading the way, the master of the domain passed out to a survey of the farm; but Mrs. Grippin called him back to take from her table the pile of dirt intended as the basis of his mathematical calculations.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW JERUSALEM.

MONTCALM observed that part of the estate which was open to his view. The white wrap of winter was nearly worn out, but here and there islands and peninsulas of snow glimmered in isolated stations from the somberer areas of lately uncovered earth, or stretched away in varying and grotesquely formed curves to join the more protected strips along the fences. The cultivated land on that side of the road was enclosed in semicircular shape, and a strip of timber extended from the swamp to a point northwest of the house, as if starting out to cut the improvements in twain, and afterward repenting of its design. At the western end it terminated in a patch of shrubs over which could be seen the tops of the statelier trees beyond. To the east the hardwood timber, mostly of oak, skirted, till it nearly reached the road, along the marsh which bordered the great swamp. The only signs of vegetable life which were visible to Montcalm were in the spruce and pine, which could be distinguished from the tamaracks by their evergreen branches.

With the major discoursing volubly as they went along, the two men passed to the barns. These were three in number. The largest, ornamented on the top with three cupolas and a prancing horse, was the center from the extremities of which branched the others, nearly forming a yard, which was completed by a connecting fence.

A discourse, which his biographer has not taken the trouble to find, was given by the major on the character and phrenology of each beast: on the horse which would threaten but never kick, on the one which would kick but never threaten, on the cow which would jump from good to poor pasture for the mere satisfaction of being unruly, and on several others which would jump from poor to good pasture for obvious reasons.

"Here is the finest animal I have," said the major, laying his hand on the hip of a horse with a long foretop and a fine head and ears. "Zachary Taylor, probably the best blooded horse in the county. Taylor went in two fifty-nine when he was four, just previous to his purchase by me. He ought to beat that by twenty seconds now, but I have let Maria and Manie drive him. Next summer nobody except myself shall hold a rein over him. Taylor, old boy, you want an ear of corn? You have not seen my machine shop," said the animated old man, opening the door of a building at the west end of the group of barns. "Are you interested in machinery?"

"I have an interest in progress," answered Montcalm, "but little knowledge of mechanics."

A practical machinist would have had much difficulty in classifying the various specimens of constructive talent hanging on the walls and strewn in chaos about the floor. Old reapers, clocks, fanning mills and threshing machines had been dissected to furnish material for wild inventive schemes, more than half of which had been left unfinished. A strange looking wagon had in an unusual degree the merit of originality. Each wheel, six feet high, revolved on a peg set between two upright posts. These posts were connected at the top so that the vehicle had no axletree. Two boxes suspended from the posts, and about two and one half feet in height, were joined together by an attachment underneath.

"A revolution in road vehicles is coming," began the major. "The days of hard pulling and breaking horses' legs by blows from the tongue are almost over. You can see at once that this wagon must have a light draught. The attachment of the tongue down low lessens the rolling friction on the ground, and the six-foot wheel does a great deal to lessen the sliding friction on the axle. Let me make that plain. The passage of the wheel along the ground is called friction, but I question its right to the definition. One molecule is planted on the ground and rests there until another takes its place, when it rises and a second particle becomes the pivotal point, to be succeeded by the third, fourth and so on. The only friction then is in the adhesion of the surfaces as the upper one is planted down and removed; a great difference, you observe, from that which comes from passing parallel with the surface of a body. But that at the point of the revolutionary pivot is different. Here the wheel is continually scraping over the axle, a resistance which it requires much more force to overcome. A six-foot wheel revolves every—let me see—every six multiplied by three and one thousand and four hundred and sixteen ten-thousandths," and the major began to figure on the wall, " every time it goes eighteen and eight thousand four hundred and ninety-six ten-thousandth's feet. A four-and-one-half-foot wheel revolves, I'll tell you in a moment—every time it goes fourteen and one thousand three hundred and seventy-two ten-thousandth's feet. The smaller wheels, having a swifter movement at the pivot, occasion a greater amount of friction."

Montcalm, though tortured by the tedious harangue, practiced his well learned art of flattery by attention, and tipped his head on one side with an air of gravest concern.

" If I had it in shape," pursued the major, " we would hitch on and try it, but it is not ironed yet, and it has cost me too much labor to use it up recklessly."

Montcalm hastened to protest against the sacrifice to his curiosity of an invention which had cost so much labor of hand and brain. He was anxious, very anxious, to see the wagon tested, but he begged the major on no account to subject it to a trial until it was properly ironed and fitted for running.

" I'll tell you what we can do," suggested the major. " Get in and let me draw you, and we will try its draught."

To this proposal Montcalm objected, but he volunteered to act as horse while the major rode. Accordingly the inventor seated himself in the product of his genius, which Montcalm drew back and forth, praising the lightness of its draught and suppressing the grunts whose utterance would have belied his statement.

When Montcalm's energy began to flag, the major inquired, " You do not know the name of the wagon, do you, Trace ? "

"No, I was wondering about that," answered Montcalm; "it seems to me an ancient name would be proper, some kind of chariot,—Pharaoh's chariot for instance."

"No," said the major, shaking his head and clambering from the vehicle, "I call it the New Jerusalem."

"What induced you to call it that?" asked Montcalm. "Was it the splendor of the ornaments you mean to put on or some reason which I do not comprehend?"

"Well," answered the major, purposely keeping his auditor in suspense, "it is a long history. Some years ago there was, over across the swamp, an old man by the name of Barrow, an out-and-out Adventist. He said the world was coming to an end before long. He could not tell exactly when, but it could not be longer than '69, and he could prove it by the prophecies in fourteen different ways. He used to go up and down the road to Break o' Day, and to the neighbors' houses, without a hat, always with the same strain, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen.' A quarter of the topers and loafers who hung around Rorus's drug-store were scared into leaving off an occasional spree, and the other three-quarters had some fun repeating his prophecies about the restoration of the Jews. One day he came bareheaded out to the barn, where my men and I were looking over the old wagon, the first one I invented, and he began:

"'The world's going to burn—going to burn up, I tell you. The time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen' (the old man always talked fast), 'and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. Come out of her, my people. The Jews are to be gathered to Jerusalem.

"'When will the great day come? "For the day of vengeance is in mine heart and the year of my redeemed is come.

"'"From the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days."

'" 'That which the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten ; and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.'

'" 'We've had the caterpillar and the grasshopper and the potato-bug and the weevil. Describes it exactly.

'" 'And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by.'

" 'Jerusalem has been so they couldn't raise a thing there, not a thing, and now they're raising wheat. Wheat in Jerusalem! They sent a thrashing machine there last year.

" 'We've got to turn in with the Jews and go to Jerusalem. Never mind your wagon, Ratke. You better make a Jerusalem wagon.'

" Well, the idea struck my men so forcibly that they dubbed it the Jerusalem wagon, and the name always stuck by it. I like it well enough myself, and so after I made the second one, to distinguish between them, I called it the New Jerusalem."

It is as yet an unsolved problem how long the old man would have continued the recital of these reminiscences had he not been interrupted by a strange clamor from near the house. The noise seemed to be produced by the strokes of some metallic object against a steel plate, which had a resonance sufficient to make the sound continuous.

" Dinner! " exclaimed the major.

As the men left the machine shop, the cause of the commotion was apparent to Montcalm. Mrs. Grippin, with the energy characteristic of all her actions, was using a two-foot iron bar to belabor a long upright saw suspended from an apple-tree, and that superannuated piece of machinery was protesting against the punishment with the most doleful lamentations.

" You have not expressed your opinion of my bell, Trace," said the major.

" It has a very powerful voice," commented Montcalm.

" Make an estimate of the cost of that bell," said the major.

" Ten dollars," suggested Montcalm.

" No."

"Twenty-five dollars."

"No."

"I give it up," said Montcalm.

"I calculate that that bell cost me about ten thousand dollars," said the major, watching his companion to note the effect of his words.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Montcalm, manifesting the proper amount of surprise. "How is that?"

"That is the old upright saw which used to be in McGraw's mill," said the major. "I got it for one dollar, and, in less than a month, I had the plan for a drag-saw for small logs that was ahead of any invention which had been projected up to that date, for it was to take only two horses. One day, about noon, I heard a hubbub loud enough to wake the nations, and when I got where it was, I found Maria pounding the edge of that saw just as she is doing now. See how viciously she strikes, as if she were bent on destroying the last vestige of its usefulness. She had banged the teeth so much that using it afterwards was wholly out of the question. I always suspected that she did it on purpose to defeat my plan. And she did. I turned my attention to the old Jerusalem, and before I did anything more with the saw, a Wisconsin lumberman had the start of me. If all people were like her, this would be an unprogressive world."

On entering the house, the veteran found awaiting him a visitor, whom Mrs. Grippin introduced as follows:

"James, here is a man that wants work."

The major made mental observations on the capacity of the new-comer for labor.

The young fellow, who was not more than twenty-two years old, gave his name as John Wrengell. His stature was above the common height, but his form was not stocky. He had Saxon blue eyes, light brown hair and the sensitive nature which accompanies the nervous temperament. The evidence of a strong character was visible in his well-shaped head, his expressive countenance and his intelligent, though embarrassed speech.

The introduction to the ladies exhibited a vast difference between Montcalm and Wrengell. Montcalm bowed with a courtesy which was at once easy and pleasing.

Wrengell blushed, mispronounced one name, half mumbled the other, and in sitting down overturned with a backward sweep of his arm the heap of dirt so much doted on by the major.

Miss Warfle with much difficulty repressed her mirth, and the old officer with still more trouble kept back his irritation from open expression.

"There, James," exclaimed Mrs. Grippin, who arrived on the scene just in time to see the sand and gravel scattered over the floor. "There, I told you you'd have that thing tipped over. Can't you bring in dirt enough on your boots without lugging it in in a heap to make me sweep up?"

"I thought," responded the major, "that my model hill would keep its line of direction within its base, and that its cohesion would not be acted upon by external forces sufficiently to destroy it. My clay mound stayed here two weeks, and it constantly maintained a preponderance of attractive over repulsive forces, but clay possesses more viscosity than sand."

"Viscosity," repeated Mrs. Grippin in disgust. "Now you've got on one of your high-sounding strains. Can't you talk so anybody can understand you? Who ever heard of viscosity?"

"It is a mortifying fact," said the major, putting a degree of solemnity into his voice, "that I have a sister who does not know the meaning of viscosity. It is derived from the Latin viscum. Viscum, viscositas; French, viscosite; Provençal, viscositat; Spanish, viscosidad; Portuguese, vis——"

"What do we care about your viscos and viscovuses?" retorted Mrs. Grippin. "When you talk common English, folks give you credit for some sense, but when you try to show off so smart, everybody is disgusted with you."

The approach of the hired men was now heralded by the confused hum of voices, varied now and then by a boisterous laugh. When they had taken their turns at the wash-dishes, the towel and the looking-glass, they passed to the dining-room.

CHAPTER III.

A GLIMPSE OF FARM SERVICE.

THE farmhouse had been built in the days of Ratke's prosperity. It was gothic in design and had three principal rooms—the sitting-room, the dining-room and the parlor.

On the northern side, and extending to the kitchen at the eastern extremity of the dwelling, was a tier of bedrooms and closets. Not satisfied with the half-dozen sleeping apartments in the row alluded to and several more in the chamber, the major had provided for the construction, on the side facing the street, of two more bedrooms which, jutting inwardly, formed a narrow hall between the sitting-room and the parlor.

The main divisions of the house were inappropriately named, or, at least, not named according to the uses to which they were put. The dining-room served much as a sitting-room, the sitting-room on account of its superior warmth was used in cold weather as a dining-room, and the parlor, which contained the organ and the library in four bookcases, was almost daily used by the family. It is true that this subversion of common usage was much censured by Mrs. Grippin, but there were, as we have seen, on this estate and in this household, certain evils which even she was powerless to remedy.

There were seated around the extension table thirteen persons, the resident family of four, six hired men, two prospective ones, and the agent, who was called Panicky, and whom the major had easily persuaded to stay to dinner.

"Major," said a fellow whose name was Brown, "how is it when you're shooting birds on the wing? Do you want to aim straight at 'em or a little ahead?"

"A little ahead, to be sure," replied Ratke, and, laying down his knife and fork, he gave a discourse of five minutes on the principles of absolute and relative motion.

"There, Wingscheut," exclaimed Brown, "the reason you didn't hit the quail was because you aimed straight at her."

"Tat ain't te reason at all," answered a tall German with dark hair and a fringe of whiskers running underneath his chin. "I aim't chust as you tolt me an' tat's te reason I titn't hit 'im."

"Will," asked the major, "did you take good care of Taylor?"

"I fed him and curried him off," replied Archer, the man whom Ratke addressed.

"Yes," said the German, in the loud tone he had previously used, "unt, if it hatn't a peen for me, you vootn't a hat no Taylor."

"How is that, Wingscheut?" queried the major.

"Vell, you see," began Wingscheut, "las' night I vass sleepin' in te clup-house. Unt, chust apout tvelf o'clock, I heert te parn toor co skveak. Vell, I know provitin' te toor co skveak, somepoty pe tere. Vell, I sit up. Unt I co out py te tool-house. Ven te toor stop, I stop. Vell, ven te toor co skveak, I co on. Pimepy te toor go skveak acin, unt two tam horse-tiefs, tey come out vith Taylor. Unt tey vass pic fellers, piccern ole Chon Tafis.

"Vell, ten I come out from te tool-house. Unt I catched poth of 'em hiplock, von on von hip unt von on te otter. Unt I trowet 'em. Unt I pountet 'em till tey hat te sorest faces. Provitin' you hatn't a peen asleep so sount as you couldn't vake, you voot a heert 'em yell."

"Why didn't you hold 'em when you had 'em?" asked Jake Sheppard, the oldest and most trusty of the hands.

"Vell, you see," answered Wingscheut, "Taylor he gits avay. Unt he runs up te roat. Unt I titn't vant to lose a horse vat vass vorth a tousan' tollars for two tam horse-tiefs vat vass goot for notting at all. So I coes on after Taylor. Provitin' you ton't pelieve me, I can show you vere tey lay."

"Wingscheut give 'em sore faces, for I saw him," whispered a solemn-looking young man from the lower end of the table.

Every one present listened to this confirmation of Wingscheut's doubtful veracity.

"Vell, you see," continued Daggett, the voiceless young man, mocking the German's peculiar accent, "Vingscheut unt me, ve kilt te tam horse-tiefs, unt ve took teir scalps. Unt four more tam horse-tiefs, tey come up to git Taylor. Unt Vingscheut catched two of 'em hiplock. Unt I catched two of 'em hiplock. Unt ve kilt 'em. Unt ve took teir scalps. Unt ve vent on to te svamp. Unt ve fount sixteen more tam horse-tiefs. Unt ve kilt 'em. Unt ve took teir scalps. Unt, provitin' you ton't pelieve it, ve can show you te scalps."

When Wingscheut had mastered his disgust and an immense mouthful of beefsteak, he said:

"Provitin' I vass such a liar as tat, I voot crawl off in a holler loc unt tie."

"How do you get along with the one-man saw, Jake?" queried the major.

"Back aches like time," answered Sheppard, drawing his hand along his spine.

"That is strange," observed Ratke. "The one-man saw is certainly a great saving of labor. It allows you, instead of stooping over, or dropping your hands by your side, to push toward the log straight from the shoulder. The motory power is in the muscles of the shoulder and upper arm; and this power, the hand and the saw, should be as nearly as possible in a straight line. The common cross-cut, as it is worked, with the hands on a level with the hips, is a lever of the third class, power in the center, fulcrum at one end and weight at the other. In this lever there is a gain of motion and a corresponding loss of power. But, as to the loss of motion in the one-man saw, that can be easily made up by a swaying movement of the body."

At the conclusion of the meal Wrengell and Montcalm hired out for the summer, Wrengell getting twenty dollars per month, and Montcalm, out of consideration for Ratke's friendship for his father, receiving twenty-five dollars. Montcalm stayed in the house, conversing with the major, while the rest of the hired men, together with the vender of medicine, or Panicky, went to the club-house.

This building was a two-story upright, whose dimensions were thirty-two by thirty-six feet. On the ground floor were three bedrooms and one larger apartment, which contained a clock with an alarm, a table, a stove, common chairs, rocking-chairs and all the furniture necessary for the comfortable accommodation of a family.

Panicky surmised that Archer was bilious, that Sheppard had lumbago, and assured Daggett that all he needed for the complete restoration of his voice was a bottle of Great American Panacea. By a series of harangues on individual complaints, followed by an eloquent exordium, he sold a bottle of the panacea to the hands, of whom all, except Wingscheut, contributed equally to the purchase-money.

"Well, boys," said Jake Sheppard, "I'm a-goin' to work."

"Oh! there ain't no hurry," declared Archer; "the major he wouldn't say anything if we didn't go for an hour yet."

"Maybe he wouldn't say nothin'," replied Jake, "but right's right, an' loafin' roun' when you're paid to work ain't right."

The major sat watching the departure of his nieces, who were about to drive his trotter, Taylor, to Break o' Day. The girls were passing a small house not far from the swamp.

The preceding spring Philetus Takum had come to Ratke with a piteous appeal for help. He had been turned out of doors by his landlord, and left without shelter for himself and his family.

The major, against the remonstrances of his household, erected a tenement house near the swamp and put it into the possession of Takum. But Philetus proved a disappointment to his benefactor. Not only did he neglect to pay the promised rent, but he circulated some annoying untruths and many more annoying truths concerning Ratke and his mortgaged estate.

The most valuable of Takum's personal property was a mongrel shepherd dog which bore the name of Lina.

Next in value were two of her full-grown progeny, which Philetus kept, for he had made many a solemn declaration that he would not sell a pup for less than one dollar, and he had been offered for the largest one only eighty-five cents. Mrs. Grippin declared that the dogs ate eggs, and that their master had an equal fondness for stolen chickens.

Ratke was sitting, as was his wont in meditation, with his left leg thrown over the arm of his rocking-chair, his elbow on his knee and his head resting on his hand. Left to himself, he plunged deeply into his philosophical studies. His mind was clear, his absorption complete. The principles of nature's mighty phenomena, enlarging in scope and simplifying in form, passed one by one before his vision with clearness and majesty; and, as he thought, more than ever showed the harmony of natural and mental philosophy.

He became conscious that something was drawing him away from his delightful reverie. Some external circumstance was tugging at his attention, which still clung tenaciously to the theories which he was formulating. Reluctantly he dropped his hand and threw his left leg from the arm of the rocking-chair, when he heard the voice of Mrs. Grippin calling from the chamber,

" James, James."

" Yes," returned the major, throwing his leg back to its favorite position.

" James, James," cried Mrs. Grippin, more loudly than before.

" All right," responded Ratke.

" But it isn't all right," said the housekeeper. " Come up here, and you'll see that it's all wrong."

" I suppose I must go," thought the major. " Maria is a continuous force, which, though exercising a slight amount of influence per unit of time, in the lapse of concrete time brings to bear a stress, the total amount of which is enormous."

When he entered the chamber, Mrs. Grippin was standing on a box by a north window, from which she was endeavoring to obtain a view of the woods where the men were at work.

"I can't see many of them," she said. "There is the new man you like so well with the one-man saw. See how he has to pull! It looks as though it would break his back. He's got that swaying motion of the body you tell so much about. I guess nobody would pull that thing through a log without swaying the body."

"If that is all you want of me," remarked the major, "I will go down."

"I think some of the men are shirking," said Mrs. Grippin. "The woods are in the way so I can't see them. You'd better go down where they are."

"I do not like to appear suspicious of them," the major remonstrated. "Does it not please you to know that others have confidence in you?"

"Yes, confidence in everybody," answered Mrs. Grippin; "that's the trouble with you. Men consult their own interest and they don't work hard for other folks unless they have to."

"Why," ejaculated Ratke, "you are advocating the principles of 'Elementa Philosophica de Cive.'"

"What do I care what you call it?" returned Mrs. Grippin. "I tell you, you can't trust folks in that way without watching them."

"Bolder yet!" exclaimed the major. "Now you are branching off on the Leviathan. I never thought you would be a Hobbist, Maria."

"Do I have any more hobbies than you do," furiously retorted the housekeeper; "you, with your nonsense that nobody else can stand? I'd talk about hobbies."

"No, no, Maria," mildly expostulated the major. "A Hobbist means——"

"I don't care what it means," interrupted Mrs. Grippin. "James Ratke, if you don't go down there I won't get a morsel of dinner for your men. Now, you can understand. You can do just as you like."

"I can go for the sake of peace," said the major, with a sigh.

When he started from the house, he was looking over the tops of some tamaracks at the right of his destination, which he meant to reach by means of the path leading to the woods. Now it is unlikely that anything in the tamaracks interested him, if at that time he was conscious of their existence. Whatever the cause of his abstraction, it had the effect of taking him far out of his intended course. Nor was he aware of the deviation until he was confronted by the thick growth of bushes, which, to enter, he had to part with his hands. Suspending temporarily his meditations, he came upon a path which ran transversely through the shrubs, and which crossed at right angles the one which he had intended to follow.

He proceeded along this path and stopped near a broken tree whose upper portion, lying on the ground, was hidden from him by the standing stub. Glancing around and satisfying himself that he was not observed he said slowly and emphatically,

"Proposition I.: The will of man has the power of independent decision.

"Proposition II.: All external forces acting upon the will are persuasive and not coercive." Here the major paused and spatted his hands with great emphasis.

"Proposition III.: Whenever in——"

There was a rustling in the bushes followed by a succession of very rapid and heavy blows from an ax. Going around the stub, the major came upon Archer, who was working at a rate which, had it been maintained, would soon have cut down the patch of grubs so circumscribing to the observations of Mrs. Grippin. It is impossible to tell which one of the two was most embarrassed, the hired man who had been sleeping on the fallen tree or his employer who had been caught in what would generally be considered a very foolish soliloquy.

Each felt that he had drawn the unpleasant attention of his companion, and each consequently gave no heed to the weakness of the other.

The major was the first to speak.

"You are knocking them down at a great rate, Will."

"Yes," answered Archer, springing toward a sapling, which he felled at a few tremendous strokes.

"I would not heat myself too much," protested the major. "There are other days coming."

"Got to earn our money," returned Archer, rushing at another sapling.

"It seems to me," remarked the major, "that one making such violent exertions as you are would be encumbered by two coats and a jacket."

"Ain't had time to take 'em off yet," explained Archer, as he threw aside his superfluous clothing. "Whew, but it's warm!"

"I think I will go over where the boys are," observed the major. "I only hear one saw there."

Archer, clearing his throat, struck up a fragment of a song, whose pitch to the end was not more than a note higher or lower than the one with which it commenced.

"There was a man in days of old,
He had a daughter as I've been told;
And this daughter, she had a lover
Who was not liked much by her mother."

At the conclusion of the doggerel strain, the woods were ringing with life. A saw vibrated more energetically than the one which Ratke had first heard, and several axes were swung so rapidly as to produce almost a clatter.

"Right at it," remarked the major, as he neared the spot where Brown and Daggett were sawing. "I see that there are a great many ergs of work in my men."

Daggett's hard sawing, by which he had sought to lull the major's suspicion, resulted in a fit of violent coughing, and he was obliged to seat himself on a log and wait until the paroxysm had passed.

"That is a bad cough, boy," said the major, "and you are making it worse by getting heated."

"Oh, I'm all right," returned Daggett.

"No, you are in a bad condition," contradicted the major. "I insist that you take a more moderate gait. I do not wish you to exhaust your energy before the commencement of the summer's work. I must go up where Trace is now."

"Hanged if I ain't ashamed," commented Daggett, when the major had gone out of hearing. "Here we've been playing off all we could, and the first thing we know he comes around and tells us to go slower. I half believe that, if I was well, I'd pitch in and work decent for the old fellow."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," returned Brown. "You wouldn't like that any better than you do now. We didn't have much warning, did we? Will got asleep. He must of. An' it wasn't the square thing to do."

"No, it wasn't," affirmed Daggett, forgetting his resolution to be industrious. "We'll get even with him for that. Go up and tell him the captain demands his immediate presence."

Archer, whose craving for sleep had been nearly satisfied by indulgence, was not loth to leave his position as sentinel. Such a summons was usually the forerunner of sport, and he believed, from the direct manner in which Daggett had sent for him, that, for the coming amusement, he was not to pay the reckoning.

But the discontented looks of the men gave token that they were not in the best of humor, while by their frequent glances toward him he was warned that he was the object of their dissatisfaction.

"Well, boys," he called out, "has the old man gone? I done my duty as a sentinel, didn't I? I warned you."

"Yes, you did warn us," said Daggett in a whisper which was almost vocalization, "after the boss had got here. That was a great way to do."

"I didn't see him," explained Archer, "until he got right onto me. And the first thing I knew I heard him getting off some of his philosophy trash."

"You vass sleepin'," asserted Wingscheut. "Tat vass a mean trick. Provitin' I cootn't vake up a little vile, I voot co to pet."

"Take him to the guard-house," ordered Daggett.

Archer was seized, and, despite his struggles and threats, thrown to the ground, when the men began to cover him with brush. Whenever he attempted to rise, he was pushed back; and, as soon as he threw aside a bush, it was succeeded by another. So, realizing the uselessness of further resistance, he lay still and was at once completely hidden by a quantity of limbs.

"Helloa, boys, here comes the major!" exclaimed Daggett. "Lay low, Will, till he goes. It won't be long."

"That rate would pile all the brush there is here in a short time," remarked the major, as he stood among the men. "It is a good plan, too, to complete the work as you go. Here are some limbs which have lain so long that they have been grown over by sod. Pile on those old poles while you are about it."

Thereupon, to Daggett's delight and Archer's dismay, the major brought a log larger than any of the hands could carry, and placed it upon the brush-heap, which was already large.

"Have any of you a match?" inquired the major. "I believe I will fire this heap."

The men looked at each other in alarm.

"No, we haven't," answered Daggett.

"Why, I have one," said Ratke. "Now let us get some of these dry leaves together and we may make it burn."

"It will not go," remarked the major, as the flame flickered and died out. "If I had another match, I could start it. "Now, boy, come up and get something for that cough."

"Oh, I don't want anything for that," returned Daggett. "That will be all right when it comes warm weather."

"We must attend to it now," urged Ratke.

"No, I guess I won't go," said Daggett, feeling very uneasy at this manifestation of his employer's kindness.

"What, mutiny?" exclaimed the major, putting his arm around the young man and dragging him along. "You see that you have no option in the matter."

Daggett noticed that the major made no remark about Archer's disappearance. He had a suspicion that the philosopher, even when he was showing him such marks of kindness, understood the faithlessness of him and his fellows. Looking back as he was passing through the shrubs, he saw a head of wavy black hair emerging from a brush-heap and a fist shaken viciously toward him, but he kept the discovery to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

A CIRRUS BECOMES A NIMBUS.

'DID you get me any letters, Manie ?" asked Ratke as he met his nieces, who were coming from the barns.

"Two of them," answered Manie.

"Maria," said Ratke, when they were in the dining-room, "get Mark something for his cough. I am going into the sitting-room to read my letters."

The first missive which the major opened bore a Washington postmark and read as follows :

WASHINGTON, D. C., March 4, 187—.

Mr. J. Ratke,
Break o' Day, Mich.

DEAR SIR :—As the commissioner expresses doubt concerning the practical value of your invention, I find it is difficult to obtain a patent. I must receive fifty dollars before I proceed further.

Respectfully yours,
F. B. SACKETT.

"The leech !" muttered the major ; "he would gorge himself with my substance. But let me once get my Jerusalem wagon started, and I will bid defiance to patent lawyers and creditors. What do I care for the few drops the insect gets if their place will soon be supplied by a liberal infusion which will send vigor through my veins ?"

The contents of the second letter are given below.

JACKSON, MICH., March 4, 187—.

Mr. J. Ratke,
Break o' Day, Mich.

DEAR SIR :—We spoke to Mr. Green about the matter which you mentioned. He says he cannot postpone the foreclosure of the mortgage a day.

Yours respectfully,
COLLINS & JOY.

The effect of the two communications was to produce an unwonted depression in the major's spirits. It was as if a cloud of whose existence he had been not ignorant, but to which he had been inattentive, had suddenly by a warning bolt made him give heed to its proximity.

No matter in which direction he turned, he could not find a way out of the perplexing difficulty. Schemes which were his hope, his very life, demanded money for their furtherance. His produce was sold, his pocket-book empty, his credit gone. He realized his situation; and, in the distance, he felt he saw, approaching, calamities which would destroy his dearest projects and involve in ruin himself and his household.

Mrs. Grippin interrupted these miserable reflections by saying,

"He's in here, William Henry Harrison, if you want to see him!"

The visitor was William Henry Harrison Hibbard, whose first three names had been given him at his birth, applied in sport during his boyhood, and used through habit when he had reached man's estate. William Henry Harrison had fits; and these fits had reduced his mind, if not to imbecility, to a state of intelligence considerably below mediocrity. The spring before, the Republicans of Jefferson township had, for want of better amusement, nominated him for constable; and the Democrats had so far fallen in with the joke that, though they had a large majority, the half-wit was elected.

William Henry Harrison was tall and slender, his mouth was large, and his hair was light. The most conspicuous part of his raiment was a long, loose ducking jacket which was belted tightly about the waist, and whose lower edges flared out from his body like an umbrella top. As this was his most expensive article of clothing, and as he never wore it except on important occasions, it was by the local wits called his official coat.

"Well, William Henry Harrison," inquired the major, "do you have a great deal to do as constable?"

"No, not 'nawful sight," answered William Henry Harrison.

"That was a fine run you made last spring," observed Ratke. "I believe you beat Johnny Hemp?"

"Yes, I lick 'im. I run 'way 'head."

"Did you ever arrest anybody or serve a summons?" inquired Ratke.

"Dono, guess not," replied the half-wit.

"Probably not," said the major, half to himself. "In the machine of law you are a pinion, whirled by the belts and pulleys of courts, which are, in turn, propelled by the engine of legislation. But you are satisfied with your condition, and that is more than can be said of many who think themselves your superiors. Content, as you are, with your lot, you may as well be a pinion as an engine."

"Yes," remarked William Henry Harrison, "engine might bust."

"By George!" exclaimed the major, "but there is wisdom in that. The solid iron pinion can be broken only by external forces, while the hollow engine may, itself, generate the power by which it is rent. Likewise, the humble mind escapes those internal conflicts which bring ruin to some of the mightier intellects. William Henry Harrison, that is the wisest remark I have heard in a month."

Upon this unusual compliment, the author of the saying so highly praised grinned, covered his mouth with his hand and looked steadily at Ratke for some minutes.

The major, tiring of the half-wit's scrutiny, had recourse to a stratagem which seldom fails to remind a forgetful guest of the object of his visit.

"Let me take your hat," he said.

"No," replied William Henry Harrison, taking his hand from his mouth. "I no stay, Misser Green, he git mad."

"So you stay with Green yet," observed Ratke.

"Yes," answered the half-wit; "Misser Green, he git me new straw hat I give you this paper."

"Oh, it is a paper you are serving on me!" exclaimed Ratke. "Make Green give you your regular fee, and tell him that constables are not obliged to take straw hats in payment for the performance of legal duties."

The document proved to be a summons which had been issued by Justice Lyman Sparks, in behalf of Josiah Green, who had purchased a note due the Buckeye Manufacturing Co. of Marlboro, Ohio.

"Go back to Josiah Green," said the major, "and tell him that you performed your errand. Tell him that I bound up his financial wounds when the priest and the Levite passed him by. Tell him I lent him money when his place was mortgaged for its full value, and no one else would trust him. Tell him he owes me yet for a cow and wheat which I let him have when his family was sick."

"I can't 'member so much," said William Henry Harrison, alarmed at Ratke's vehemence. "Misser Green he whip. Oh! whip big."

"Halt," ordered the major, as the unique constable moved toward the door. "You have been a faithful officer and you have earned your supper. You must eat with me. Instead of making Green mad, it will please him to think he is relieved from the expense of feeding you. Maria rang the saw before you served the summons."

"But," said the half-wit, "I can't 'member that you say when mad."

"You need not try to remember it," was the major's answer. "You could do so if you could once comprehend it, for you have no doubt a preponderance of memory over the reflectives. Your mind is not brilliant, and, when by accident you stumble upon a sensible expression, it shines as forcibly as a bolt of lightning from the darkened sky at midnight. Do you understand what I say?"

"No," answered William Henry Harrison.

"It is as well that you do not," commented Ratke. "I would rather you would not understand all I say, because I want to talk, and I do not wish to hurt your feelings. Now, I will tell you something which you can understand, William Henry Harrison. To-day you have been a smarter man than I have."

William Henry Harrison was so pleased with Ratke's approbation that, at supper, he endeavored to obtain more of it by delivering some witty speeches. Disappointed in receiving encouragement to continue his remarks, he allowed his own appreciation of his sagacity to be visible in several prolonged grins, the last of which was frozen by one of Mrs. Grippin's frowns.

After the meal, as he stood irresolutely in the sitting-room, he remarked, "I have fit purty soon. I tell."

"I will tell Trace to hitch up a horse and take you home," said Ratke, hastily passing to the dining-room.

The major, returning, found William Henry Harrison on the floor, with his limbs alternately contracting and expanding to their utmost capacity. The half-wit's eyes were rolled back, his face contorted, his figure writhing and twisting and his lips covered with froth. On the floor about him were the fragments of a large mirror, which had cut his hands in several places.

When William Henry Harrison had finished his first and last official visit, Ratke observed, "The Buckeye Company agreed to wait a year for that note. I wonder that so careful a man as Green should send such an officer as William Henry Harrison."

"You needn't wonder," returned Mrs. Grippin. "He did it to be mean, just to tantalize you. If it ain't legal, he'll send another man with it. Oh, I would like to talk to Si Green a minute. I'd like to tell him some things. If it hadn't been for you, he'd have starved and his whole family. You can get mad if you want to, Nora. I know he's your aunt's husband. But that don't make any difference. I should think you'd be proud of him, a man that's got rich making cider. He's done more harm in this neighborhood than he could do good if he should live to be as old as Methuselah. Him, a member of the church, making cider and selling it to get men drunk."

"I wonder how he found out about the note," said the major.

"It's that Phleet Takum," replied Mrs. Grippin. "He keeps posted on your business better than you do. He has done a great deal to destroy your credit."

"It is strange," remarked the major, "how a man of Philetus' ability can do so much harm. I can explain it in no way except by the law of virtual velocities: 'Power, multiplied by the distance through which it moves, equals weight, multiplied by the distance through which it moves.' To accomplish a given result, then, a man of half average ability must move through twice the space, or, in other words, bestir himself twice as much as an ordinary man.

Here comes Trace. I must see how he left William Henry Harrison."

Montcalm informed Ratke that he had left William Henry Harrison at Green's gate, apparently none the worse for his fit.

"Do you know he is an officer of the law?" queried the major, as he was unhitching a tug.

"No, is he?" ejaculated Montcalm.

"The Republicans and part of the Democrats of Jefferson township," said Ratke, "disgraced themselves by electing that poor idiot boy to the office of constable. To-day he made his first official visit."

"I am surprised," commented Montcalm.

"That is all I can tell you," said Ratke quickly, feeling that he had already said too much. "To succeed in business a man must bridle his tongue. If he gives a knowledge of his affairs to the gossips, he places them before a double convex lens, which may converge the heat of public scrutiny to melt his gold, as that metal is sometimes melted at a powerful focus."

"I have no wish to pry into your affairs," replied Montcalm. "On the contrary, I am opposed to receiving from you any confidence which you may afterward regret."

"This much I can tell you, Trace," said Ratke. "The constable's errand was not to perform a duty connected with criminal law."

"I felt assured of that," replied Montcalm. "You will never be suspected of crime. I will care for this horse if you will tell me how much grain to feed him."

It often happens that a skillful investigator will by professed indifference lull suspicions of his art and extract much information which by any other means he would be unable to obtain. This is what was done by Montcalm. Ratke thought that he had been boorish with the son of his old comrade. He would atone for his surliness by a partial explanation.

"This is a civil matter," he remarked, "a little debt which I owe and which I thought would not be presented for collection in a year."

"You have been hardly fair with me," said Montcalm.

"You have not allowed me to do the chores enough to learn them. How much grain do you feed this horse?"

"Never mind the horse," exclaimed Ratke impatiently. "You do not seem to like to listen to me, Trace. I have been sued by Green. He has bought a note of twenty dollars against me. Not that it is anything serious, but some other things unite with it to make up a combination which promises me trouble. The farm is sold on the mortgage in July."

"Your Jerusalem wagon ought to help you out," said Montcalm.

"Oh," replied Ratke. "If I could get my wagon into the market, I could pay for my farm. If I could pay for my farm, I could get my wagon into the market. Both are wedged in the narrow passage of fatality, each waiting to be extricated by help from the other. To-day I received a letter from my patent lawyer, stating that he must have fifty dollars or he could not proceed further with the business. I bought a cow of Osborne for thirty dollars and I agreed to get her in two weeks. I can muster not more than twenty-five dollars with which to meet these sums. I own a farm, the Barton hundred and sixty, which is east of the county line and which is unencumbered. I might mortgage that, but I hate to do it."

"Is that the extent of your trouble?" asked Montcalm. "I can lend you one hundred dollars. Last week I got my quarterly dividend on a one-thousand-dollar share of stock."

"One thousand dollars!" cried the major. "One thousand dollars surely cannot bring a quarterly dividend of one hundred dollars."

"The quarterly dividend is one hundred and fifty," said Montcalm.

"In what kind of stock have you invested?" queried Ratke.

"That I am not at liberty to tell," responded Montcalm. "Every member of the company is bound to keep its operations secret."

"Get out of it as soon as you can," advised Ratke. "It is fraudulent, or there would be no need of secrecy."

"I will do so at once," acquiesced Montcalm. "At the next quarter I will withdraw my capital."

"I am suspicious of such organizations," said Ratke. "Did you ever hear of Nijni Novgorod oats?"

"I never did," replied Montcalm.

"That," pursued Ratke, "was the most successful swindle which was ever worked on the farmers of Michigan. For every bushel of grain which the company sold to a farmer, it received ten dollars and agreed to sell for him the next year twice that quantity at the same price, minus the agent's fee of twenty-five per cent. Thus, for each bushel of grain the farmer bought, he gave ten dollars and got fifteen. He was bound by agreement not to sell the oats for less than they cost him. Jackson County went wild over the speculation. As the Nijni Novgorod fellows gave credit and took notes for pay, every one had means to invest.

"After harvest the agents were not to be found. Then the crisis came. The notes had passed into the hands of those whom the law calls innocent purchasers and, of course, had to be paid. Men put their property out of their hands to avoid payment. Jasper Smith, a prosperous farmer who had been defrauded to the amount of twelve hundred dollars, hung himself in his own barn. Yet this lesson, severe as it was, did not educate the people. They would seize with avidity the next chance to be swindled."

"I will get out of the company at the next quarter," assured Montcalm. "By that time I shall have doubled my investment."

"Oh, I would not be too fast," said the major. "But they will never draw me into the scheme. I would like to have one of their agents come here. I would give him a snub which he would not soon forget."

"The company will not attempt to inveigle you," replied Montcalm. "It does not send out agents. It wishes to be composed of those only who are now its members."

"How clannish!" Ratke exclaimed, "to want to keep a good thing all to itself. I have no patience with such companies. You can tell me something of its nature, Trace?"

Not without a permit from the president and directors," answered Montcalm. "I must keep my promise of secrecy, even though I offend my father's friend and mine."

"Break your promise to no one," said Ratke. "But you can write to them for permission to impart the knowledge I wish?"

"They may not like to let you know," suggested Montcalm. "Nevertheless, I will write."

"I will risk it," replied the major. "They would give me permission to join if I desired to do so. Now, I have no wish to join you. But you write and ask them if I may. I will wager a box of cigars that they will accept me as a member."

"Done," said Montcalm, "and I will show you their answer. I am certain of my cigars, however. They will admit no new members."

"They are very exclusive," commented the major. "Are they afraid of contamination from the common people? None of them have better blood than I. My ancestor, Johann Ratke, was a grandson of Martin Gerard, the uncle of Erasmus. What king of the fourteenth century wielded a more powerful and more enduring scepter than the philosopher of Rotterdam?"

CHAPTER V.

RAMOTH GILEAD PREDICTED.

THE next Sunday was cloudy and cold. The raw west wind swept along stray flakes of snow in almost horizontal lines. Saturday Wingscheut had hailed the sight of a chipmunk as a certain omen of immediate spring; and this bleak Sabbath had followed, as if the very elements delighted to disprove the predictions of the false prophet.

For six successive days Mrs. Grippin had been indulging in regret and blame for their absence from church the previous Sunday: regret for the rain which had furnished an excuse for non-attendance, blame for the inconsistency of the boastful soldier and philosopher, who bragged of indifference to red-hot cannon balls, and yet was afraid of a few little drops of cold water.

For these trials the major had his consolation. It was the common lot of philosophers to be censured and abused. Did not Guericke suffer from popular ignorance and prejudice? Was not Galileo assailed and even obliged to retract his theories? And had not Socrates his Xantippe, the prototype of Mrs. Grippin?

The church, which was of good size, considering its country location, stood on a slight elevation, about three-fourths of a mile west of the Ratke dwelling. Between the edifices the ground curved and merged in a miniature valley which occupied most of the distance. Southwest of the house of worship were the farm buildings and cider mill of Josiah Green, who held the mortgage on the major's estate.

The pastor, a man quick to discover motes and beams in the eyes of his congregation, and ready to grab at the offending particle or bulk the instant of its discovery, had prepared a philippic for the special benefit of Green.

His text was Romans fourteenth chapter and twenty-first verse: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."

Starting from the premise that each one, in a measure, molds the character of his neighbor, he launched boldly into the theme of man's responsibility for the conduct of his fellows.

"What is it that we are to refrain from doing? Anything, remember, anything, by which our brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

"That which injures our brother may be quite harmless to ourselves. Nevertheless, if it diminishes his virtue or his faith, we should avoid it, even though the degree of decline be so slight that it is visible only by Him on whom that faith is fixed.

"One of God's people, if he were not in the trammels of Church discipline, might be placed in such circumstances that he could dance without moral degeneration. But if, thereby, his brother is led into bad company, if possible converts avoid a faith whose votaries seem insincere, it is his duty to lop off the pleasure, even though it be dear as his right hand.

"Card-playing could be indulged in without sin, provided we were sure that no sinful consequences would follow the game. There is no contamination in the pictures or the card-board. The queen of clubs does not look wholly depraved. The king of hearts, though his appearance is not prepossessing, is too lazy and inefficient to be a power for evil. Bibles which carry a knowledge of the Saviour to the center of barbarism, are made from the same material as spades and aces. But for all that, card-playing entices to evil. Card-playing should be tolerated in no Christian or moral home.

"Who will say that there is evil in a glass of cider which is guaranteed never to touch the lips of man? Yet, cider is the greatest curse which this community has ever seen. More than beer, more than whisky, more than the horse-thieves, against whom so many anathemas have been breathed, cider is bringing its awful harvest of pain and crime. But in this congregation,—for I see them now,—

are men in whose cellars are cider barrels, whose sons, following their father's lead, descend the stairs, turn the faucet and change themselves into receptacles of the potion which would make fiends of angels. Ay, brethren, I see those who manufacture the damning beverage, to be poured into the throats of topers and of boys now unpolluted, to lure them on to places of infamy, to leave them helplessly wallowing in the mire of debauchery and whisky, for whisky is the natural successor of cider. And these men, together with their victims, are descending to the lake of fire and brimstone, not on a stream of pure water reflecting the sunlight from its sandy bed, but along a river of yellow cider reeking with the smell of rotten pomace and of dead men's bones."

The rural preacher supported the above denunciation by awkward gestures and a high degree of earnestness. Green's manner, while he was receiving in addition to this chastisement the glances of most of the congregation, was less perturbed than usual. He was a spare, nervous man of medium height. It was his custom in church often to look out of the window, to cross and recross his legs and to show other signs of restlessness.

On this occasion, leaning his elbows on the back of the pew in front of him, he looked steadily at the preacher. He appeared heartily to indorse the sermon and to have no suspicion that it was intended for him; and, when he received a bolt more crushing than its predecessor, he smiled, as if approving the condemnation which was to be meted out to some other man.

In class meeting he rose as he had done nearly every Sunday for a dozen years, said a few words hastily, and sat down with the air of one who rejoices that he has finished an unpleasant duty.

Montcalm was invited to a position in the choir. As he and Manie sang from the same book, many a rustic swain shared the jealousy of Wrengell.

After class meeting Lyman Sparks arose to make "a sejestion."

"There's one thing we forgot about, brothers and sisters, the donation to Brother Osborne's. We ain't made any pervision for the needcessties o' the 'casion. Of course, there'll be some needcessties, an' we ought to make some pervision for 'em. I motion that we have a committee o' three to pervide for the 'casion."

When the motion had been passed, Mr. Sparks again arose.

"I sejest the names o' Brother Osborne, Brother Green an', well, mebbe I've said enough. I don't want to have too much to say about this thing. Somebody else sejest another name."

Sparks was chosen as the last committee man, the benediction was pronounced and the people dispersed.

"I'd like to see Lime Sparks tell me what to cook," said Mrs. Grippin, as she was on her way home, "or Si Green. If they come poking their noses around where I'm cooking, they'll get out, that's all."

In the afternoon, while the rest of the family were out at church, Nora entertained Fred Loomis, the clerk in Dr. Rorus' drug-store at Break o' Day. Loomis was stylishly attired. He had town manners, a slight frame, and an equally slight mustache. On matters of dress and general deportment, he trusted his judgment implicitly, but, in conversation which required the higher attributes of mind, he felt his weakness. Often, when he thought a remark or circumstance amusing, he suppressed a laugh until one of his associates demonstrated by example the propriety of its indulgence.

When evening came, this village dandy, Nora, Manie and Montcalm were in the parlor.

The clerk and Nora on a couch whispered and giggled, while Manie and Montcalm, in a further corner of the room, maintained less secrecy and more dignity.

"That is a fine likeness," observed Montcalm, pointing to a portrait of a man who had a broad, high brow, large, expressive eyes and a stern, intellectual face. "Every boy knows Senator Mallard's picture. One can almost think that he sees the words of his last great speech issuing from those firm-set lips. He is a recognized champion in debate."

"Yes," said Manie. "He and Uncle James were classmates at college. He has visited us several times since I can remember. Uncle James is a Democrat, you know, Every time Senator Mallard comes they engage in a hot political discussion, which Uncle James begins, unmindful of his previous defeats. Uncle James says he is the only man who ever conquered him fairly in argument."

"Conquest by him is no disgrace," returned Montcalm. "It is the common fate of those who oppose him. Will you please favor us with a song or some instrumental music? A love of the beautiful is the very origin of music, and it is what you have shown in the decoration of this room. The cheap and the gorgeous you have eschewed, while you have drawn liberally from unpretentious and intrinsic beauty. The picture at the right of the mirror is an illustration of my statement. Here we have, well portrayed, a pleasing scene in rural life, a fine house and barn, with mountains looming up in the background. See how neat everything is about the place."

"Everything is unnaturally neat and proper," replied Manie. "The horses' heads are too high. The sheep are too large, and that cow looks as if she were posing for a picture. Nobody ever saw so square and high a load of hay as that one going into the barn. The man on it is standing so straight that he will bump his head unless he stoops. The artist could have improved the picture by tipping over one of the lightning-rods and tearing down a gate."

"It need not show slovenliness to be accurate," Montcalm answered; "I acknowledge your superiority in logic, but I still contend that I am right."

"Allow me to give you a compliment in return," said Manie. "You would make an excellent lightning-rod agent. Every man you met would have fat hogs, blooded cattle or smart children. Get your note-book and I will give you a list of flattering remarks which would insure a sale.

"Compliment one, Intelligent farmer. Compliment two, Large chickens. Compliment three, Smart children. But, if your pleasing speeches are addressed to a lady, do not have them.

"Compliment one, Robust and healthful. Compliment two, Fragile and delicate."

"I am wounded by the lash of sarcasm," said Montcalm. "Each neighborhood has its local satirist, pouring out MacFlecknoes and Dunciads on hapless Shadwells and Cibbers. This character, varying in sagacity and bitterness, according to training and original talent, native cheerfulness and the world's usage, is a necessity to progress. No great reform is accomplished without his help. Whenever society moves slowly in its duty, he strikes the hindmost; and though the laggard may not afterward be found in the front of the procession, he is apt to abandon the position of rear-guard to another, who in turn finds it an inconvenient and dangerous post. But I will not class you with the common satirist, for you have shown more refined talent than he. You have been taking lessons of Pope, Juvenal and Swift."

"Now, you are losing your art, Mr. Montcalm," said Manie. "First, you ascribe to me the most delicate sensibility, and now you class me with as vulgar a satirist as Swift. Do you think I would write the, 'Tale of a Tub'? I am glad that, if I have not the genius to compose the Dunciad, neither have I the vindictive spirit which prompted it. You should memorize your flattering statements, and then they would not conflict."

"Now, I am hit sorely and wantonly," said Montcalm. "How often have I been proceeding carelessly, if not unwittingly, in error when I felt a smarting, agonizing blow; and I knew that I had been struck by that scourge of scourges, that whip of scorpions, the lash of the local satirist. Then, I sometimes encased myself in the armor of reasoning and excuse, and, confident in my protecting mail, took up my old line of march. But a certain man (or woman) drew a bow at a venture, and behold, Ahab was smitten between the joints of the harness."

"If Ahab would avoid the fatal arrow," returned Manie, "he should shun the field of Ramoth Gilead, or, better still, he should not make covenants with Ben-hadad."

"Make covenants with Ben-hadad?" said Montcalm, nervously turning his head. "What does that mean?"

"Ahab did not enter into an offensive and defensive alliance with Ben-hadad," Manie replied. "He merely spared the life of the wicked Syrian when he had him in his power. He who compromises with, or refuses to attack error, commits the sin of Ahab; and he will meet his punishment as surely as did the son of Omri."

"Then every man who temporizes with evil will meet a bloody death?" queried Montcalm with a smile.

"You must not infer that," answered Manie. "As the sin differs in some respects from that of Ahab, so in all probability will the punishment. But he who permits the perpetration of an evil which he can prevent will not be held guiltless. To that man, in some way, in time or eternity, Ramoth Gilead must come."

Montcalm saw that, whatever his ability in compliment, Manie was more than his equal in argument, He determined now to abandon the contest, which he would not so long have continued had he not wished to give her the flattering opinion of her own skill as a controversialist.

"Give Ahab a truce," he said. "The donation at Mr. Osborne's is next Friday night. Mr. Sparks advised us to make 'pervision for the needcessties o' the 'casion.' My chief 'needcessty' is a companion for the evening. May wicked Ahab presume to ask you to ride in his chariot?"

"Oh! I'm a-going to have some fun!" exclaimed Nora, jumping up and rushing to the sitting-room.

"What is she going to do?" asked Montcalm.

"Nobody knows what she is going to do," Manie answered.

In a few minutes Nora returned, bringing with her Archer. The hired man, whose body was encased in a blue coat with large brass buttons, strode into the room, carrying his head and shoulders very erect.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Ratke," he said with a profound bow.

Archer in his youth had been taught that a married lady's proper title is Mrs.; and he had broadened this definition until he made it embrace every member of the sex, whether married or unmarried.

"Oh, Mr. Archer," said Nora, "we're so glad you've come. We want you to sing for us."

"Well," responded Archer, tipping back his chair and spreading the sides of his coat wide apart with his hands, at the same time taking care that the brass buttons should be conspicuous, "I don't pretend to be much of a singician, but folks used to say I could sing."

"Of course you can sing," persisted Nora. "Good singers do have to be urged so. Fred can't sing bass, and Mr. Montcalm can't sing it, and so we want you to. Now, Mr. Archer, don't make any more excuses, but go right up and help them sing."

Manie much against her will went to the organ and assisted Montcalm and Archer to sing "The Sweet By-and-By."

Archer, maintaining the same pitch throughout the hymn, tapped the floor with his foot, bobbed his head from side to side, and without any approach to a tune rumbled away with all his might.

Nora's enjoyment of the scene was well-nigh perfect. She clapped her hands, rolled over on the sofa and, but for Archer's monotonous "By-and-By, By-and-By," would certainly have been heard by him.

"Oh, that was splendid, Mr. Archer," she cried, when the hymn was concluded. "I wish I could sing like that. Now give us a song, please."

"What kind of a song, Mrs. Warfle?" Archer inquired.

"Something sentimental," answered Nora. "That's what we would all like to hear."

Thus encouraged, Archer began to sing a narrative, most of which on account of its tedious length must be briefly told in prose.

"Come listen to the awful tale,
That in song I shall bewail,
About a preacher's only son,
And all for love he was undone.
He was but eighteen years of age
When in love he did engage."

When he was twenty years old, after receiving a call to preach, he repeated his proposals of marriage to the young lady.

"But her people, they did object
To him, because he had no prospect."

Her affections blighted, the maiden pined steadily away, and an anxious friend made the following inquiry:

"Madam, what makes you look so pale?
Madam, what makes your colors fail?
Your cheeks was once like roses red,
And now they look as though you was dead.
Your eyes was once as black as sloes,
Now to the grave methinks they goes."

On this solicitation the maiden, telling the story of her love, imparted a warning to those who interfere with affairs of the heart, and at the close of the injunction gave a wail of agony and expired. The parents, stricken with grief at their loss, sent for the minister's son.

"Then to the funeral he did go,
Was dressed in black from top to toe.
This noble young man took his bed,
And in a week more he was dead."

With a voice alternating between a roar and a yell, the singer told the moral to the tragedy in forty lines, four of which are subjoined.

"Now, all you people, far and near,
To stop true love you should ever fear;
For young folks parted sighs do heave,
Sometimes they die and oft do grieve."

"Oh, dear! Oh, my! Oh, my! Oh, dear!" ejaculated Nora, making no attempt to conceal her mirth while the clerk, as he thought, very properly seconded, with less effusiveness, her demonstrations of glee. "Oh! that's awful good, Mr. Archer. That's splendid. Oh! my! Oh, dear! 'Sometimes they die and oft do grieve.' What! You're not going now, are you?"

"Yes, it's getting along towards bedtime," returned Archer, whose perception, though dull, was still acute enough to show him that he was being made the butt of ridicule.

"It is too bad," said Manie, when Archer had gone. "I am ashamed of you, Nora. You have no right to hurt people's feelings in that way."

"Preach all you want to," retorted Nora.

"Won't you do an errand for me?" she asked, accosting Archer, who had not yet taken his departure from the house, and whose countenance suggested that he was in ill humor from the treatment which he had received.

"Well?" answered the hired man gruffly.

"I wish you would tell Mr. Wrengell to come up here," said Nora.

"I'll see," returned Archer in a tone which showed that he had no intention to oblige her.

"Oh, please, Mr. Archer," pleaded Nora. "I do so want to see him. Tell him, and I'll remember it a long while, and I'll think how good you was. Won't you, Mr. Archer?"

"Well, yes," said Archer hesitatingly, "I'll tell him."

Wrengell was surprised at the summons which he received. Without waiting to make some needed changes in his apparel he started, and soon stood in the dining-room, embarrassed and expectant.

"There are some young folks in the parlor," explained Nora. "We want you to join us."

"Oh, I can't possibly."

"Yes, you can," said Nora, taking his sleeve and pulling him gently along. "There is nobody in the house that will hurt you. Come on, now, without any more excuses."

"Don't you go into any of your nonsense, Nora," said Mrs. Grippin, as they passed through the sitting-room.

The major without the knowledge of Mrs. Grippin had placed in one of the parlor bedrooms a chair, the rounds of which had been broken. Nora, quickly slipping into the bedroom, brought out the superannuated piece of furniture for Wrengell, who was too embarrassed to notice the maneuver. At the instant he sat down, however, the spreading chair legs and descending cane bottom warned him of the insecurity of his position and compelled him to bear most of the weight of his body on his legs.

"Won't you sing us a song, Mr. Wrengell?" said Nora with a giggle, which was echoed by the clerk.

"I do not care to sing," answered Wrengell, now comprehending her motive in enticing him to the parlor.

"Oh, please, do sing us something sentimental," said Nora, interspersing now and then a smothered laugh between the words, "something about somebody that—that died for—for love, you know."

"Sing something of your own selection," suggested Manie, endeavoring by kindly encouragement to atone for Nora's misdemeanor.

On hearing this invitation Wrengell came to the conclusion that the company had entered into a conspiracy to make him appéar ridiculous; and his embarrassment was quickly supplanted by anger.

"Thank you, I do not care to sing," he responded.

"Perhaps you will play for us," said Manie.

Springing to his feet, with such violence that the rickety chair spread out its loose-jointed legs and squatted nearly to the floor, Wrengell went quickly to the organ.

The instrument broke forth into a roar of wrath. It seemed to bid defiance to the company, to tell them that the man whom they had insulted was above and indifferent to their sneers. Gradually the notes decreased in volume and increased in rapidity, until the sounds appeared almost to coalesce; yet not once did the fingers of the player err in the selection of a key or appear to move more swiftly than their normal gait.

Such a manifestation of proficiency where none was expected filled the four auditors with astonishment.

Manie and Montcalm listened in admiration, Nora opened her mouth in surprise, while the shallow clerk glanced at her to ascertain if he were to grin again at Wrengell's expense.

With exquisite modulation Wrengell changed the music from anger to solemnity and from solemnity to pathos; and he brought out with unusual distinctness that one superiority of instrumental over vocal music, its application to individual thought without the circumscription of language.

A song beautiful in conception and glowing with power often fails to produce an impression, because he for whom it is rendered finds in it nothing which coincides with his sympathies or experience. But he who hears a well-played instrumental has no assurance that it was not composed for the benefit of his special class. To the resigned sufferer the solemn largissimo may be a strain of patient resignation, while to the misanthrope it is the wail of hopeless despair. The sparkling brillante, which animates one to heroic deeds and lofty aims, fills another with dreams of the revel and the debauch,

It was impossible to tell in what channel moved the reflections of Manie and Montcalm, who, alone of those present, were capable of appreciating the skill of the musician. But whether they were impelled to noble or to base purposes, they were moved, in no common degree, by those finer variations, those nicer shades of expression which distinguish the touch of the master from mere agility and correctness of movement.

Wrengell rose from the organ with as much suddenness as he had approached it, and, determined to show his indifference to their opinions, he left the parlor, casting back a look of contempt, which he meant to include every person in the room. Passing through the sitting-room, where the major and Mrs. Grippin were engaged in a controversy, deliberate on the one side and furious on the other, he went through the dining-room, the kitchen and into the open air.

It was with dejection that Wrengell entered the chamber of the club-house and seated himself on the only unoccupied bed. The affront which had been given him in the major's parlor was by no means the first which he had been compelled to bear. From his infancy disgrace had been his lot. He had been told the story of his drunken parents, of his mother who was sent to the penitentiary, of his father who wandered to a distant state, there to be imprisoned for some offense the details of which were forgotten but the commission of which was being frequently recalled. Taken from a poorhouse at an early age by a farmer, who was ever reminding him of the charity, he strove manfully to repay the debt which, he fancied, he owed. He was given severe tasks to perform ; and the story of his degradation was spread broadcast by the man with whom he lived, to such an extent that he was publicly shunned.

When he was unable to bear the exactions of his foster-father, Wrengell left the shelter of his roof and turned his attention to his neglected education. Working between terms and studying nights, he made excellent progress ; and, at the time he commenced work for Ratke, he had gone half through college and had taken the greater part of a thorough musical course.

And this boy, without wealth, with a lineage so mean that its very mention gave him shame, was proud, proud as they who openly ignored him, proud as that greater number who recognized his title to acquaintanceship, but drew between him and them a barrier which, more felt than seen, prevented the relations of intimate friendship.

Slowly he drew off one shoe and bared his left foot. It was not a perfect member. The main part of the foot was symmetrical, but from the outer edge branched a sixth toe, which increased in size the extremity of the limb and made a small protuberance appear on the surface of the shoe.

Wrengell looked down at the malformation with a feeling almost of hatred. How often in his childhood, when, before he was large enough to work, he went barefooted to school, had his companions pointed sneeringly at his deformity. The drunken father, the depraved mother, the sixth toe he had considered component parts of his disgrace.

He had thought that, far from the associations of his youth, he might escape the obloquy which had weighed him down. He believed that the mark of shame was upon him, that it was visible to whomsoever he met, that it had been seen by the Ratkes, and that by them he was despised.

Archer had been by common consent relegated to the farther corner of the room, and was there snoring comfortably and noisily. Wrengell, knowing that no common circumstance would awaken the slumberer, went to his bedside, and, taking down his violin, which hung over his head, commenced to play a lively air. The music had been in progress not a minute, when the loud talking on the ground floor ceased, and Brown called " Helloa ! what's the racket up there, Will ? Less go up, boys," he added as the playing continued.

Wrengell had barely time to throw down the violin and get into bed before the men were in the chamber.

" He's learned a new piece," said Daggett, " and he's improved mightily."

" 'Stonishin'," remarked the Canadian, Thompson.

"Why, boys," exclaimed Daggett, as the sleeper exhaled a deeply rumbling current of air, "he's asleep."

"Did he play that in his sleep?"

"He must of," replied Brown.

"Less wake him up," said Daggett.

"I tell you vat," observed Wingscheut, "you can push unt you can pull, put tey can't no man vake up Vill Archer."

Straws, snuff and pepper were applied to his nose, but their sole effect was to make him give uneasy sniffs and change his position.

"Say," exclaimed Brown, dragging him half out of bed and at last getting the sleepy eyelids to unclose, "why don't you play like that when you're awake?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUERRERO MINING COMPANY.

It was a model spring day. The snow had quite disappeared, and the ground was relieved of its superabundant moisture so nearly that the roads were in fair condition for the passage of teams. Ratke's barnyard, tracked up by the stock, was a lone quagmire, surrounded by stretches of solid earth.

Montcalm had just returned from Break o' Day, where the major had sent him for the mail. Ratke, wishing to avoid the unpleasant observation of Mrs. Grippin, made a detour and reached the barns in time to help him unhitch the horse.

"Here are your cigars," said Montcalm, extending a wooden box as Ratke drew near.

"What cigars?" asked the major.

"Do you not remember?" Montcalm queried; "you bet me a box of cigars that the company to which I belong would accept you as a member? I felt sure of the wager, but you have won it."

"You should have known better than to bet with me," said the major, taking the cigars. "I have seen more of the world than you have."

"I have discovered that to my cost," replied Montcalm.

"I am anxious to hear the revelation which the company allows you to make," said the major.

"Very well," said Montcalm, "but first you must sign this agreement not to disclose the information you receive. It is a mining company," said Montcalm, when Ratke had signed the printed agreement, "and is located in the province of Guerrero, Mexico. Two miners of Chicago got tired of prospecting out West and finally went southward. South of the city of Mexico they found what they believed to be rich diggings. They returned to Chicago and interested some men of moderate means, who formed the Guerrero Mining Company. In their excavations they came upon many curious relics, such as pottery, weapons and bodily ornaments. They exhumed a skeleton seven feet in length, with silver bracelets on its arms and ornaments of the same metal on its legs. The scientific men have disputed as to the date of its interment. Professor McDowell claims it is the remains of an Anahuac who lived previous to the union of that tribe with the Chicimecs, while Dr. Hartsuff is equally positive that it is a relic of the ante-Toltec period. Professor McDowell is writing a work on the ancient races, which he intends to publish as soon as the existence of the mines is generally known. What is your opinion on the subject, Major ? "

" We will discuss that some other time," replied the major, who was not particularly well posted on American aboriginal history, and who wished to consult his authorities before committing himself.

" Here is the letter which they wrote me," said Montcalm.

" They seem like candid fellows," remarked the major, after perusing the missive. " Notice that, Trace.

" ' Major Ratke's reputation as a veteran of the Mexican war is such that we are not afraid to trust him with the knowledge he wishes. A new mine has been opened, and we can let him have one share of stock, provided he sends us his application for membership as soon as the fourteenth of March.'

" You see," continued the major, " they have heard of me. The people are beginning to revere the veterans of the Mexican war. But they have picked up specific information about me. Are there any of my old comrades in the company ? "

" I do not know," replied Montcalm. " They may have read in the histories of your military exploits."

" No," said the major ; " my name was mentioned in the newspapers which gave an account of the war period, but it never appeared in history. Tell me something more about your company."

" All its members whom I know," said Montcalm, " are men whose characters are beyond reproach. They wish to keep the knowledge of the mines from the money kings, until they have occupied the best diggings. They pay a quarterly dividend of fifteen per cent. on the capital. That is sixty per cent. yearly. Mr. Bruce, a friend of mine, who used to live in Cortland, gave me the chance of membership."

"I like your company," said the major, "because of the men of culture who are in it and who prop it with respectability. Where are you going, Trace?"

"To the woods," answered Montcalm. "I have not yet worked up that old tree-top."

"What is the use of your being in such a hurry?" asked the major impatiently. "You have not told me all about the mining enterprise."

"I will do so at noon, to the best of my ability."

"One thing troubles me," said Ratke, "and that is the mortgage on my place. Unless relief comes, the farm must be sold in July. I hoped that I might die where I had lived in the prime of manhood. Here I have planned and worked. In that tool-house have been generated those mental children, whose births have cost me the pangs of labor, whose nurture and development have been my constant care, and which, I had hoped, would be the comfort of my declining years. If I am to be driven from my home, it would be a solace to know that that building will be pointed out as the one in which were cradled the creations of a mighty inventive genius."

"I trust that you will not be reduced to so poor a consolation," said Montcalm. "My father was heavily in debt, and he paid the mortgage on his place."

"How did he manage it?" inquired Ratke.

"The mortgage so nearly covered the real value of the property," answered Montcalm, "that it was difficult for him to obtain the money. He was obliged to give his creditor a deed of the farm and take a bond for the deed."

"A bond?" queried Ratke.

"Yes," responded Montcalm; "his creditor bound himself by a forfeit of $20,000, to deed back the property, provided the debt was paid at the specified time. My father cleared the place of the incumbrance in three years."

"If I could get such a chance," said the major, "I would accept it. Of course it would be a risk. But, unless something is done, I am certain to lose everything. Times are hard, and nothing will sell now. Land would bring a very low price if it were put up at auction. In case my property must go, I would rather see it pass into other hands than Green's. Stay a little longer, Trace."

"I am paid for my time," answered Montcalm firmly, "and I must improve it."

"Just like your father," said the major. "Nothing ever kept him from duty. Well, since you will go, I will make it as easy as possible for you. You can take the one-man saw."

After Montcalm's departure to the woods, Ratke seated himself on a log which was on the south side of the central barn. The sun, whose warming rays are most appreciated after a hard winter, beat down with just enough heat to make the position one of comfort. The major, enjoying the delightful temperature of the place, glanced upward to note the spot where the lines of heat struck the barn-boards and were reflected downward to him. He located the angle of reflection formed by that most pleasing ray which touched the back of his neck. It was above and at the right of a protruding nail and under and to the left of an oval knot. This done, he traced out the normal which with the perpendicular completed the plane of reflection. He estimated how far away must be an object which interrupts the sun's rays, to produce a cold wave sixty seconds from the time of interruption.

Opposite to his dwelling the hired men were engaged in the work of transferring the hill to the quagmire. Some of them were laboring faithfully enough. There were, however, two notable exceptions. Wingscheut and Archer, on the sunny slope of the elevation, out of sight of the house and, in their opinion, of the major, were seated on the ground kicking up the dirt with their heels.

Ratke wished that he could bar from them temporarily the calorific or heat rays of the sun, so that the mild climate of the hillside would be changed to the frigidity of winter. How he would enjoy watching them as the gradual decline in temperature came on. They would slap their hands and stamp with their feet and put off the hardship of work as long as they could, but they would have to—yes, they would have to, get up and shovel or freeze. Then, when they were industriously at their work, he would remove the obstacle and let the pleasant warmth again stream down upon them. Of course there would be a relapse of laziness and a consequent reapplication of the remedy, but they would soon learn that friction develops heat, that there was a relation between the action of the shovel and the transmission of the calorific rays, and he would have the power of securing efficient service from his hired men.

A foreign body passed between him and the scene of labor. To the preoccupied major the object seemed to divide, the under and larger piece remaining stationary, while the upper portion fell off and continued to advance. With an effort the major drew his attention from the hill and recognized Durgenson, a cattle-buyer and dealer in agricultural implements.

Durgenson also dealt occasionally in horses and sheep, and was well liked in the community for his square dealing, his readiness to accommodate and his frank, jocular manner. The only thing which had ever blackened his good name in that region was his rumored connection with the Nijni Novgorod oat scheme, but he had demonstrated to the satisfaction of the farmers that he was guiltless of complicity in the fraud. He was a large, square-shouldered man with a closely-trimmed, full beard which gave him an appearance sterner at a distance than in close proximity.

"How is everything, Major?" he said, with the heartiness which had made him popular among the rural classes.

Ratke, resolved to reap some advantage from the intrusion on his meditations, broached to the cattle-buyer the subject of a loan.

"I don't hardly know what to tell you, Major," responded Durgenson. "I'd like to accommodate. I would. But I don't see how I can now. Can't you get the money of Berry?"

"I have been to Berry," answered Ratke, "and I have been to every moneyed man in the county. They all talk as you do. It will be no risk to you. I will give you a deed of the farm; and you on your part must sign a bond to deed it back provided the money is paid at the specified time."

"I don't see how I can help you, Major," said Durgenson. "I couldn't let you have a loan any longer than August. That is, I wouldn't agree to, for I'm thinking I'll want to use my cash then. That wouldn't pay you at all. You might better get it of some one that can wait."

"There are no such men in this vicinity," returned Ratke. "You can let me have it until August, you say. That may be long enough to save me. Whatever happens, I do not want the place to go on the mortgage, for I cannot endure it to be gloated over by Green. I tell you, Durgenson, I am crowded to the wall, and, unless I get help, I shall be ruined. I will pay you twenty per cent interest and secure you so that you can lose nothing."

"Oh, I don't want your twenty per cent," said Durgenson. "Seven will do me. If I can accommodate you, I'll be glad. That's all. Of course I'll have to have the bond just as we talked. Maybe I can let you have it four or five years. It depends altogether on whether I get in a pinch or not. I shall have to draw up the papers to make it payable in July."

"That is satisfactory to me," said the major. "Suppose we meet at Sparks's to draw up the writings this afternoon."

"All right," responded Durgenson. "By the way, have you any fat cattle to sell?"

As the major had no cattle of any description to sell, Durgenson took his departure.

That afternoon in the office of Justice Sparks James Ratke signed the instrument which gave sections fourteen and twenty-three and the north half of section eleven to Hiram B. Durgenson, his heirs and assigns forever. The major's hand moved unwillingly as he took the pen. The word "forever" in capitals looked to him unnecessarily large. He had hitherto refrained from placing an incumbrance on the Barton hundred and sixty. But after the deeding away of the larger part of his property, he went to Break o' Day and, that he might invest in the Guerrero Mining Company, mortgaged this, the last of his real estate.

Returning to his home, he found Mrs. Grippin and Manie getting a basket of cakes and pies in readiness for the donation, which was to be held that night.

Manie had accepted the offer of Montcalm's service as escort. Nora, disappointed in securing the attention of Fred Loomis, had acquainted Manie with her trouble, and that model of cousins had exercised her influence on the major, who had invited John Wrengell to ride in the wagon with the family. So it happened that Nora and he whose awkwardness she had mercilessly ridiculed not a week before sat side by side during the journey to Osborne's.

The major soon after his arrival at Osborne's met a reverse in his favorite warfare, argument. Lyman Sparks had brought with him Largess, a nephew of his wife and the principal of the Sharptown Academy, who, according to the rural custom, was honored with the title of "Professor." Professor Largess was an atheist; and the pride of the Sparks' who were professed Christians, was raised more by the proficiency of their relative in debate than it was lowered by the defeat of their creed. The professor was a tall, lank, loose-jointed man, who, while he was talking, walked back and forth with a bombastic swing and a rising and falling of his index finger, a habit which he had probably acquired in the school-room.

As the major was considered the argumentative champion of Jefferson township, upon him, in the absence of the minister, fell the task of defending the Biblical account of creation. This task he strove manfully to perform. But his efforts were unsuccessful. The professor was well versed in those evolutionary theories which have sprung up in the last half century, and especially in such authors as Spencer and Darwin, who, more than the direct advocates of infidelity, have sown the seeds of unbelief. The effect of this logic upon Ratke was something like that produced upon the Romans by the introduction of Pyrrhus' elephants into Italy; but, with the perseverance of that stub-born people, he determined to bring confusion to the opposing lines by the use of the enemy's own auxiliaries.

The call to supper gave him an interval of rest and an opportunity to collect his scattered forces, just as the blows of his opponent were driving him from his last redoubt. The major was a firm believer in the benefit of an abstemious diet on brain labor. While he appreciated a good meal, he liked better a controversial triumph. He ate, therefore, very sparingly, keeping his mind on the discussion and avoiding such food as is detrimental to clear thinking. Of all viands he was fondest of roast pig, and near him was a young porker prepared by a master hand, but he withdrew his gaze from the tempting brown as he reflected that baked pork requires five hours to digest.

He noticed to his satisfaction that Largess was eating heartily, almost voraciously. The professor had taken two dishes of oysters, besides pastry and other eatables, when Ratke passed toward him the platter holding the pig, which, leaving a liberal share of its contents on his plate, made a circuit of the table and returned to its original position. Whenever Largess's supply of meat was nearly exhausted and his longing glances again wandered to the platter for which he was ashamed to call, the obliging major, who was nibbling with pretended relish at his first piece of bread, politely supplied his wants. And now the professor took his third and the last remaining piece of pig from the platter, which had been seized and passed by Ratke barely in time for it to escape the clutches of a ravenous farmer at his right.

The major had a suspicion that his conduct in this affair was not strictly according to the rules of honorable warfare, that it somewhat resembled the ruse of the Central African who feeds the hippopotamus pease, or that of the sons of Jacob who converted the Hivites to circumcision only to slay them before they had recovered from the rite. Whatever his scruples, they did not deter him from maintaining any advantage which he had gained. Approaching Largess, who was picking his teeth and whose lank form actually seemed to have grown rotund, he remarked,

"~~So you claim~~ that all growth springs primarily from intelligence?"

" Assuredly, replied the professor.

" And intelligence is divided into two kinds—conscious and unconscious ?"

" That is the theory of the leading men of to-day, sir," answered Largess.

" And," continued the major, " conscious intelligence alone possesses the power of definite thought ? "

" That is not a debatable question," dryly commented the professor.

The major congratulated himself that the roast pig was taking effect.

" Which requires the higher degree of intelligence," he asked— " the creation of the simple or of the complex?"

" I am not partial to trivialities," angrily replied the professor. " But, since you wish an answer to every petty interrogation which you invent, I will tell you. The creation of the complex requires the higher power."

" Is there not some conscious intelligence about a tree ? " inquired the major.

" Conscious intelligence ? " said Largess, uncertain whether to give a negative or an affirmative answer. " Why do you ask ? " Then, thinking the major's question a declaration and deciding that it was best to oppose it, he added, "No enlightened modern scientist ever saw fit to ascribe conscious intelligence to a tree. It is contrary to recognized evolutionary theories."

" And time is a period of constant progress ? "

" No man of sense ever had the hardihood to dispute it," answered Largess.

" Now," said the major, " one question more is all I will ask. What kind of intelligence shaped that top, which Mr. Osborne's boy has probably had for his amusement ? "

" If this is your last," said the professor, " I will have patience to answer you. It was conscious intelligence."

" Allow me to state several of your propositions," said the major.

" Proposition I. : Conscious intelligence alone possesses the power of definite thought.

" Proposition II. : Time is a period of constant progress.

"Proposition III.: The creation of the complex requires a higher degree of intelligence than the creation of the simple.

"Proposition IV.: A tree is not created by conscious intelligence.

"Proposition V.: A top is created by conscious intelligence.

"Do I state your position correctly?"

"We will go back to protoplasm," said Largess. "The cause of primordial growth is intelligence."

"You wish to ignore my question," returned Ratke. "I have correctly stated your argument. A top requires for its construction one kind of wood, a knife and a boy with little mechanical skill. A tree is composed of many different elements which I cannot mention. The tree, therefore, is more complex and requires a higher order of intelligence. It is not possible for all of your statements to be correct. You assert, firstly, that the creation of the complex requires a higher degree of intelligence than the creation of the simple. And secondly, that the creation of the complex requires the lower order of intelligence. Which one of your propositions is wrong?"

"Sir," said the professor, walking back and forth and resuming the bombastic swing and the rising and falling of his index finger, "when you confine yourself to reason, I will answer you. You have no authority from science to ascribe conscious intelligence to a tree. Time is a period of progress. When that tree falls, decays and its substance is in the body of a man, then there will be associated with it that intangible thing which is called mind."

"If intelligence is the sole creator," replied Ratke, "and all growth is self-creating, when you were an oak you might well be proud of your intellect. Then you could measure out the exact quantity of each ingredient necessary to your development, and, at the same time, tell each rootlet what kind of nutriment it should contribute to the general supply. Had you in weighing let the balance slip a notch, you would have made an elm instead of an oak. Then you had knowledge and ingenuity such as is possessed by no human chemist or inventor. Now, I doubt if you have ingenuity enough to make a good ferule. And yet you say time is a period of constant progress. Professor Largess, you are indebted for your entanglement not to me, but to yourself."

"Bertrand," said Mrs. Sparks, "come away. I wouldn't pay any attention to him."

"I will talk no longer with one so unreasonable," declared the professor, going toward the bedroom, which had been made a receptacle of hats and overcoats.

"Largess," began Ratke, following him until the bedroom door was closed against him, "which one of your propositions did I mistake? Tell me. Does the creation of the complex require a higher order of intelligence than the creation of the simple? Is time a period of constant progress?"

"My batteries were too strong for him," commented the major as he was on his way home. "I completely demoralized him."

"Didn't you tell him he beat himself?" asked Mrs. Grippin. "And now you're claiming you was the one that did it."

While they were going along a level stretch of road, they were passed by Lyman Sparks, Mrs. Sparks and Professor Largess in a buggy drawn by Sparks' trotter, Madge T.

"Charge!" shouted Ratke.

The horses instantly sprang into a run. Mrs. Grippin was saved from falling only by clinging to her brother, and John and Nora were thrown in a heap to the bottom of the box.

"James Ratke," shrieked Mrs. Grippin, "you don't deserve to have any horses. You stop now, for I won't ride so. You act like a fool."

"Go on, Uncle James," cried Nora gleefully from the bottom of the box. "Don't you let him beat you, Uncle James. Oh my! Ain't it fun! We're gaining on him."

The major ran his team by Sparks, and, wishing to show that one of his horses excelled in another gait, steadied Taylor to a trot, allowing the gray Bill to lope along by his side. The change in tactics cost him his success in the race, for Sparks, urging Madge T. to the utmost, again went by him and obtained the lead on a narrow causeway where he could not be passed and racing was impossible. After turning the corner west of the church, the major practiced his team in making a quick start and in obeying instantly the summons of "Halt!"

"James Ratke," said Mrs. Grippin, when she stood by their dwelling, "you act crazy. I never saw such a man. I've a good notion to say I never will ride with you again."

"I wish," said the major reflectively, "that I had brought with us the cow I bought of Osborne. I might have hitched her behind the wagon."

"Yes," retorted Mrs. Grippin contemptuously; "then you'd have dragged her home. Tie a cow behind a wagon when you drive."

CHAPTER VII.

MONTCALM TAKES A NIGHT'S RAMBLE.

THE spring was advanced to May. A few changes had taken place at the farm. The major had prosecuted with more than his usual vigor his various enterprises. He had improved his Jerusalem wagon. He had exercised a better supervision over his hired men. He had succeeded in reducing the hill almost to a level with the quagmire, a task which, owing to his under-estimation of the number of grammes of force required for the transfer, or to his over-estimation of the number of ergs of work in his men, had taken longer than he had expected. Wingscheut, dissatisfied with the shoveling which he had been obliged to do, had hired out to Lyman Sparks, where he had found smaller wages and harder work.

The large clock in the sitting-room had struck eleven, and the Ratke family and farm hands, with one exception, had gone to bed. Montcalm, thoughtful and gloomy, sat in his bedroom. The last month had not been one of satisfaction to him. He had been accustomed to have his attentions sought after instead of seeking for an opportunity to bestow them. Some social triumphs, it is true, had been his; but Manie, whom of all women he most admired, had declined to accept his addresses, and had even hinted that his compliments savored more of flattery than of sincerity.

Irresolutely the restless hired man rose and peered from his window. The evergreens, almost touching the house, were moving slightly their branches and emitting a subdued murmur which was scarcely audible.

Casting off his indecision, Montcalm began to unlock one of two trunks which were in the room. The trunk was well fastened, requiring him to press several springs and to turn a thin key before the lid flew open and its contents were revealed. Had the major glanced over Montcalm's shoulder at that moment, he would have been struck with astonishment; but he could not possibly have named any considerable proportion of the articles which he would have seen. There were small saws, iron or steel implements, and, most curious of all, four large woolen pads, to which were attached hollow columns of leather resembling bootlegs, and each of which, when placed upon the floor, covered an area of more than one square foot.

Picking up the pads and a long steel bar and putting them into a large sack, Montcalm opened the window and climbed stealthily to the ground. From the shelter of the trees he scrutinized the road, which showed no sign of being traversed. The moon had set, but the stars, unobscured save by a few thin streaks of cloud, in a measure made up for the missing light. Passing to the barn from the lower edge of the shaded walk, he continued his way at a distance from the road sufficient to escape the observation of a possible passer-by and was soon in the rear of the tenement house occupied by Philetus Takum.

His approach was heralded by a suppressed growl, and Takum's yellow dog, Lina, and two litters of pups, one about the size of large cats, the other larger than their mother, came out to give him a canine welcome. The elder dog with the younger progeny trotted back to the nest under the house, but the larger pups capered about him as if desirous to become acquainted.

The place had about it an air of thriftlessness, quite suggestive of the character of its inhabitants. The fence which had bounded the yard had yielded to the demand for fuel, and in the place where a wood-pile had once been there were left not chips enough to kindle a fire. A light streamed through a window, from which had been broken several panes of glass, whose places had been supplied by a board, some rags and two old hats.

In the house, a female voice was charging Takum with a neglect to provide wood, and from the loft came boyish complaints, which were indistinguishable to Montcalm.

"Harv," growled Takum, "you quit your crowdin', or I'll be up there d'rectly."

Montcalm, going to the rear of some bushes, whither he was followed by the pups, lifted one of them by the tail clear from the ground, an act which elicited a doleful lament, and brought the mother snarling to the assistance of her offspring.

"Shut up, you brutes," yelled Takum, poking his head from the door. "What in thunder is the matter with 'em?" he ejaculated, as the noise continued unabated.

"Why! Mr. Montcalm," he exclaimed, as he suddenly confronted the visitor. "I didn't know you was here. I thought somethin' was the matter with the pups by the way Lina took on."

"And so there was," replied Montcalm. "This one was clever enough to call you out for me. Get your hat and come on. Get one you are not used to wearing."

"Ain't it purty light?" asked Philetus. "Seems to me it is."

"Very well," returned Montcalm, "if you are afraid, I can get some one else."

"Oh, no, I ain't afraid," assured Takum. "But I thought, you know. I'll git my hat right off."

"Get one of those from the window," said Montcalm. "Do not let your wife know that any one is with you."

Montcalm and Takum traversed the field in front of Ratke's at an angle sufficient to bring them some distance in the rear of the leveled hill. As, after crossing several other fields, they clambered over a fence which bounded a strip of timber, some sheep fled through the bushes in alarm.

"Jerusalem!" said Takum. "Wouldn't this be a fine place for a feller to help himself to mutton? I thought they was runnin' over by the church. They was last week. Green keeps his sheep fat, too. But they ain't so fat as Lyme Sparkses. His sheep is just a wad o' fat. But of all sheep ole Ratke's. Gosh all Friday! I wouldn't eat one o' his sheep for a farm. But say, if you like chickens, Lyme Sparks has got some o' the biggest, fattest Cochins you ever see. They grow quick, you know. Why, the meat 'ill almost sqush in your hands."

"I am not hungry for chickens," Montcalm shortly replied.

"Mebbe you like ducks better," suggested Philetus. "Green has got some o' the genuine Pekin. We might as well kill two birds with one stone."

"I have no appetite for ducks," answered Montcalm. "Let us attend to the business in hand."

"I s'pose nothin'll satisfy you but a goose," said Takum. "Widder Smith is the only one in this hull country that keeps geese. They're the plaguiest things to hook, though, you ever see. They'll get right on the doorstep an' gabble, gabble enough to wake the nations. But they ain't none on 'em sharp enough for me. Just you watch, an' I'll show you a trick that'll make you open your eyes."

"Is your name Phleet?" inquired Montcalm.

"That's the handle I go by," answered Takum.

"Well, then, Phleet, you have altogether too much mouth for a man of your size. Do what I tell you to do, and never mind hens and geese."

"What is that?" he exclaimed, as some animals came cautiously in view at the edge of an open space. "They are your dogs."

The older pups, which, alone, had ventured to follow, were by a few clubs sent yelping back to the residence of Takum.

"Nice help the boss picked out for me," commented Montcalm—"a fool and his dogs."

"I'm a-goin' back," said Philetus, "I ain't a-goin' to stay here to be abused."

"You can go a little ways, if you like," answered Montcalm, "about a step. At the second I shall shoot you."

Philetus was terrified as much by the kindly tone of Montcalm as by the savage words with which it was coupled. So dreadful a threat, uttered in such a manner, he believed was not an idle one. He followed in silence his superior, whom he watched with wonder and fear.

Emerging from the woods, they came to a lane which led to the barns of Green.

"You are working in finely, Phleet," complimented Montcalm.

"I'm glad you think so, Mr. Montcalm," responded Philetus in the lowest of whispers, as much pleased at the compliment as was one of his dogs at his own fondling.

"Lie here by this straw-stack," commanded Montcalm, as they entered the barn-yard. "I will take a turn about the house. Can you tell me where all the folks sleep?"

"Ole Green and Mis' Green they sleep in the bedroom this way," answered Philetus, so cautiously that he could be barely heard. "An' the fool, he sleeps upstairs. An' say, don't git mad if I talk too much, but mebbe ole Green ain't gone to bed. He don't always burn lights, just to save oil, you know."

"I am glad you spoke of that," said Montcalm, taking the opportunity to soothe Takum's wounded feelings. "I will be careful."

Philetus, whose nerves had not recovered from the shock which they had received in the woods, was content to lie hidden in the straw. He started nervously, as he heard the whisper of Montcalm, who approached from a direction opposite to that in which he had set out.

"Everything is all right. Bring on that sack," said Montcalm.

Green, following the custom which prevailed among Jackson County farmers, kept his horse-barn locked. Montcalm drew the steel bar from the sack, inserted it in the staple, and at a few hearty wrenches twisted the fastening from its place.

Takum's curiosity concerning the sack, for the satisfaction of which he had not dared ask a question, had now an opportunity to be gratified. Montcalm took one of the strange-looking articles and endeavored to put the boot-like attachment on the leg of a colt which stood in a farther stall; but the animal was high-spirited, and he was obliged to summon Takum to his assistance.

The efforts of both were required to encase the feet of the colt in the pads. Considerable noise was made by the beast, as he stepped about trying to keep his feet from the clumsy coverings by which they were being cumbered.

Montcalm ordered Takum to stay close to the corn-crib, which was between the barns and the house, while he made a second tour about the latter building.

"Everything is quiet," he remarked, as he returned to his waiting ally. "Both of us must get that horse by the bridle, one on each side, for he promises to give us some trouble."

It was as Montcalm had predicted. The animal, when he comprehended that the bulky articles were on his feet, shied from side to side and came very near jamming Montcalm against the corner of a post. But the pads, soft as boxing-gloves, so muffled the sound that it could be heard but a few rods; and when the horse trod the solid ground, his uneasiness abated.

"You may ride if you like," said Montcalm, when they were in the lane.

"No, I'd rather foot it," answered Philetus, suspecting that the colt would not prove a docile beast of burden.

With a leap Montcalm lighted on the back of the horse, which plunged furiously forward, but subsided to a slower gait when he felt the grip of the master on his rein. Philetus, afraid to lag behind, raced after his superior at a pace which severely taxed his powers and led him to the conclusion that hereafter, should he be given the choice, he would hazard a possible fall rather than accept the alternative of certain exertions which were more violent than pleasant. At the entrance to the woods Montcalm dismounted and opened the gate before he was joined by his breathless subordinate. He led the colt through the timber, as the trees and overhanging limbs might lead to a casualty should he remain on the animal's back.

"Say," whispered Philetus, "don't think I'm a-talkin' too much, but Green calls this colt Billy."

"I am glad you told me," replied the leader. "It may help me to manage him."

The direction which they were pursuing was south-easterly. Philetus was astonished to see Montcalm, a stranger in the neighborhood, lead the way through the woods with a facility which he, a practiced raider of the vicinity, could not have equaled. Nor did his surprise abate when his companion, tying his horse to a sapling, brought from beneath a rotten log a sack, concerning the contents of which he was too much intimidated to inquire, but which he believed to contain a set of large woolen pads.

They were obliged to let down a fence in order to pass from the woods. After the rails were put back to their places, Montcalm told Philetus that he might ride; and that worthy, remembering the strain to which his legs were subjected in the lane, gladly accepted his offer.

Philetus had not far to practice his equestrianism. He passed through a gate, which led into the road and which Montcalm opened.

The large square house of Lyman Sparks, visible in the starlight, stood behind its partial screen of small pine-trees. It was evident from the buildings that the farm was owned by one whose success had been obtained by mastering the details of his profession. Not a stray board could be seen about the premises. Not a picket was loose in the fence which enclosed the house. The barns were models of comfort to the stock and convenience to the farmer; and between them was a straw-stack symmetrically built and having a neatly rounded top.

In front of the barnyard were some walnut-trees, and to a limb which hung conveniently low Montcalm tied the halter-strap of the stolen horse.

"In which barn is Madge T.?" he asked.

"In the one this way, the first stall," answered Takum.

"Stand by that small building," said Montcalm, "and watch the horse. If you hear any disturbance, notify me at once."

Philetus was by the protection of a not unfamiliar retreat, for it was the hen-house which he had so often visited. His instinct of thieving—for the propensity had become an instinct—was stronger than his fear of Montcalm, especially in the absence of the latter. In a very short time he had one of Sparks' matchless Cochins stuffed inside his jacket. His intrusion aroused a cackling protest among the fowls, and the dog, which had hitherto kept quiet, now ran out and added to the tumult. Philetus, alarmed at the result of his action, went hastily to Montcalm, and whispered,

"That dog's out, and they can't nobody stop him."

"The pads are all on," said Montcalm. "Help me lead out this horse, and we will get away immediately."

"Quick, Mr. Montcalm!" said Takum in excitement. "They're a-comin'! They're a comin'!"

Just then Sparks, clad in his under-garments, shouted from his back porch,

"Halt! Where be you a-goin' with my horse?"

"Jump on her back," ordered Montcalm. "Ride east a quarter of a mile and wait. I will join you as soon as I can."

There was near the barn from which Madge T. had been taken a third party, whose proximity was not suspected, either by Sparks or by the depredators. The vender of "Great American Panacea," repulsed at every house where he had asked for a night's lodging, had sought the straw-stack, in the side of which a hole had been eaten by the stock. The barking of the dog and the disturbance in the hen-house and in the stable suggested that he was not the only intruder, and the voice of Sparks confirmed the indications from other sources. With the conviction that the location was becoming dangerous, the peddler picked up his satchels and prepared to depart. He emerged from the cavern in the side of the straw-stack at the same moment that Wingscheut, who had dilatorily followed Sparks and his boy, came around the corner of the hen-house and confronted him.

Once face to face with the supposed horse-thief, the German was far from feeling the courage of which he was wont to boast. His employer and son were on the opposite side of the barn, and before their arrival to his assistance, he might be killed by the desperate stranger. His conduct was determined by the indecision of Panicky. His valor returned with tenfold intensity as the peddler whirled, dropped his satchels and made toward the barnyard fence, and with a wild dash he caught him with his boasted hiplock and brought him heavily to the ground, yelling at the top of his voice,

"I'fe cot te tam horse-tief! I'fe cot te tam horse-tief!"

Poor Panicky clutched the wrists of Wingscheut, whose intention was mercilessly to pound him. He would have given the contents of his satchels, of his pockets, even the clothes he wore, to be placed, unhampered, four feet from his captor.

"Oh, let me up!" he pleaded, clinging to the writhing hands, which threatened to descend upon him with crushing force. "I haven't stole any horse."

"Yes you haf stole a horse," affirmed Wingscheut, struggling to free his hands, "te pest horse in te whole country. I'll cif you a face vat von't look coot in Suntay-school. Let co my hant, I tell you. Can't you mint notting? Come kill te tam horse-tief," he added, as Sparks and his boy drew near.

Montcalm did not wait to see his order to Takum obeyed. He ran down the graveled drive and to the walnut-tree before he was passed by Philetus. He had hitched the horse underneath the tree, the limbs of which were low, so that he could distinctly see neither the house nor the barn. An embarrassing difficulty was now presented. The halter-strap, at which the colt had been continually pulling, could not be readily untied; and he had left his knife at home in a pocket of his working clothes. Pulling and twisting, he managed to break the limb and disengage the severed extremity from the halter-strap.

It was at this juncture that he heard Wingscheut proclaiming that he had captured the horse-thief. He was at a loss to account for the circumstance. Madge T. had certainly raced by him, but behind the low-hanging bushes he had not ascertained whether Philetus were on her back, although he had had no suspicion that such was not the case. He laid hold of a strong stick which had been used to knock walnuts from the tree, before he decided on his course of action, but all doubts as to the cause of the outcry were at an end when Wingscheut again called Sparks to come and kill the horse-thief.

Whatever were the faults of Montcalm, he was not the one to desert an ally. Assuring himself that his revolver was ready for use, he sprang upon the back of the horse and dashed up the drive, through a gate which had been left open by Sparks, and around the corner of the barn.

The Sparkses, happening to look up in season, fled before what they supposed to be a rescue of cavalry, effecting their retreat through a second gate which led into the lane. Wingscheut, intent on pounding Panicky and unwarned by the muffled hoofs of the horse, which made but little noise, did not realize his danger until communication with the house and with his employer was cut off. He was frightened at the prospect of receiving the violence which he was anxious to mete out to another, and he limped around the straw-stack with a speed which was, for a man who had a crippled leg, almost phenomenal. His terror did not find vent in words until Montcalm raced up and struck him several blows with his cudgel, when he exclaimed :

"Ton't kill a man vat ain't to plame! Warum schlägst du mich? Was hab' ich gethan? I ain't tone notting! Te teffil, I ain't tone notting!"

Montcalm, satisfied that those whom he had dispersed would not soon organize for pursuit, turned his horse by a considerable effort and rode back to Panicky, who, satchels in hand, was preparing to leave the locality, which had for him no pleasant recollections. "Here," said Montcalm, unable distinctly to see the man whom he had rescued, and supposing him to be Philetus, "jump on quick and ride away."

"I don't believe I care to ride," answered Panicky.

"What!" ejaculated Montcalm. "Who are you?"

The marauder leaped on his horse, from which he had dismounted, and was instantly flying down the drive. His perplexity over the incident at the straw-stack did not abate when he found Takum waiting at the appointed place.

"Oh! Mr. Montcalm," whispered Philetus, "I was afraid they'd caught you. I heard 'em sayin' they'd got the horse-thief and they was a-goin' to kill 'im. This ain't hookin' chickens. We better be gittin' right out o' here."

"There is no hurry," replied Montcalm. "They are no more anxious to find us than we are to find them. Drive your horse out to the side of the road, and we will trot along. Did you see any one around the barn or straw-stack?"

"Nary a body," said Takum. "Can't you touch up your horse, Mr. Montcalm? Cæsar! how this mare pulls.

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'Twouldn't do for us to git far apart. … git away with us sure.”

“I will try to keep so close to you that you can protect me,” Montcalm answered.

“That's just what I'll do,” said Takum. “I'll stick closer'n a brother. Less see if there's any run in these horses.”

“We will stop here,” said Montcalm, as they came to a wood at the end of the road. “Let down the fence. Be careful,” he cautioned, as Takum threw the rails right and left.

“They're a-gittin' the neighbors out!” whispered Philetus. “That's Sparkses boy. Just hear him yell! Less light out!”

“They will not be here under half an hour,” said Montcalm. “We must put up this fence or they will track us.”

The wood was here easy of access. It had been used as a picnic ground and had been consequently cleared of underbrush. “Most of the trees were white oaks, the limbs of which, unadorned, save by newly sprouted leaves, admitted the direct rays of the stars and the diffused light of the rising moon, though that luminary was not yet visible above the tree tops. Farther along the slope which the plunderers and their booty were descending, the trees were taller, closer together and covered with a more luxuriant growth of leaves. The boundary between the forest and the great swamp was formed by a strip of small ash and poplars, through which led, here and there, a path.

Ordering Takum to hold the horses, Montcalm went into the bushes and soon reappeared with two pairs of high rubber boots.

“Hello,” exclaimed Takum, who was beginning to lose his apprehension of pursuit, “how did you know them boots was there?”

“It is no bad thing to be good at guessing,” said Montcalm. “Strip off your cowhides and put on a pair, for you will need them. After we get through this thicket, we will ride till we come to the high bushes.”

They rode easily through low brush and the belt of water, which at the edge reached nearly to the horses' bodies, but which grew shallow as they proceeded. When they came to the high bushes, however, the brutes refused to proceed farther. Montcalm tied the colt, removed the pads from the feet of the animals, and led Madge T., while Philetus was ordered to urge her from the rear. Sparks' trotter never before experienced such a castigation as was administered to her by the tamarack pole in the hands of the obedient Takum. Although the distance was not more than half a mile, and Philetus in wielding the pole spared neither the brute nor his own muscle, it was thirty minutes before they reached the tamaracks.

"Well," remarked Takum, wiping the sweat from his brow, "we can't git no horse through them tamaracks."

"Let me show you how these trees grow," said Montcalm, pulling one of them from the ground, in which a sharpened point had been sticking.

"I swan!" ejaculated the wondering Philetus, "somebody has cut them poles and stuck 'em back in again."

Madge T. was again tied, and the two men commenced to pull the trees from a narrow space which had been prepared for the speedy completion of a road. Many fallen and nearly decayed tamaracks, which had been left to give the way a natural appearance, were by Montcalm's command lifted aside carefully, that they might again be returned, unchanged, to their former position. It was necessary to be near the trees which had been cut and set in the ground to distinguished them from those which were standing as they had grown. But a careful observer would have noticed that the ground was disturbed, that many of the trees were leaning, and that his feet often stepped on the small stumps, which were imperfectly hidden by ruffled moss. Montcalm depended for the security of the stolen property on the loneliness of the place more than on the measures he had taken to provide for the closing of the road when his booty should have passed through. Nor was this confidence ill-founded. The huckleberries and tamaracks were so thick that in many places it was impossible to see at a distance of more than six feet. The mat of bushes, catching at clothes and striking when they were bent back and released, were certain to occupy a liberal share of the attention of a possible wanderer, if, as was quite unlikely, he might be led at that season of the year, by business or curiosity, to flounder through the mire and water which surrounded the swamp.

As they proceeded into the interior of the thicket, the trees were larger and farther apart, so that few of them had to be removed. The road here became more winding, not only because those who cleared it found it easier to pass around than to chop down a large trunk, but because this method offered less danger of detection. Presently the way became straighter and the trees smaller and more numerous, as at the edge of the tamaracks.

In a cleared spot of a few yards in area the plunderers halted. Ample provision had been made for the accommodation of the horses. By the border of the clearing were a bag of oats, some bedding and a large bundle of hay wound about with a rope. Had Philetus possessed the spirit of romanticism, he would have reveled in the scene before him. But unappreciated, even unnoticed, was that combination of picturesqueness formed by the rising moon, the spoils of the foray, the steed which had been ridden in the expedition, the dark, resolute face of the leader and the wall of marshy forest which screened him in his retreat.

The ground, which in most swamps is highest at the center, was here quite dry. It was covered by moss, on which was spread a finer carpeting—the leaves which had dropped the preceding fall; and over it arched the tamaracks, which had put forth their peculiar pointed foliage before the phlegmatic oaks of the upland had covered their naked branches after the lethargy of winter.

The second horse was more difficult to lead than the first. He pulled back on his halter and when urged by the blows with which Takum belabored him, plunged ahead with such vehemence that Montcalm was scarcely able to hold him. It was a relief to Philetus when both horses were eating together in the opening. The work of replacing the sharpened stakes occupied some minutes. Montcalm insisted that the old brush and fallen poles should be dragged back to their places and arranged with care.

More disagreeable than the task which they had completed was that of wading through the water which skirted the marsh. The rubber boots, high as they were, sank beneath the surface, and the clothing of the lower limbs was saturated with muddy water. In the border of the woods the men changed their rubber for leather boots, and Montcalm substituted for his drenched trousers a pair which he found in a clump of bushes, and which had been left evidently with a view to meeting that exigency.

"Ain't it about time we was makin' towards home, Mr. Montcalm?" asked Philetus.

"Why, are you sick of foraging?" inquired Montcalm.

"No, I ain't sick of it, as you might say," answered Takum, "but I've got enough of it for just now, you know. My legs is about petered."

"I think you and I can do a very good business," said Montcalm.

"That's about what I think," returned Takum. "Me an' you is hustlers, an' they hadn't nobody better interfere with us neither."

As Takum finished this speech, his foot caught in a brush, and he was thrown against a tree with such force that his jacket was unbuttoned and the dead hen tumbled against a log with a thud.

"How did you come by that?" demanded Montcalm.

"Well, you see," answered the terrified Philetus, "I was right there, you know, by the hen-house, you know, an' I thought it wouldn't do any hurt, seein' I knew the way in, to git this chicken."

"Was that when the dog barked?" asked Montcalm.

"No, just afore," acknowledged Takum. "You ain't mad, be you, Mr. Montcalm?"

"I would not try any such thing again," said Montcalm. "You must attend to business and let hens, ducks and geese alone. You are green at the work, but by training you will make a good hand."

"You bet your sweet neck," replied Philetus. "I ain't no two-spot. Say, don't you think me an' you could git them horses without accountin' to nobody for 'em?"

"No, it would not be best," said Montcalm. "We could not sell them without getting caught. Besides, there is a great risk in taking them. I never work in a neighborhood long after I start a gang. You and I have too long heads to wallow through swamps and risk our necks around other men's barns at night. We will do the planning, and let some one else do the work."

"Say, but there is somethin' in that," acquiesced Philetus. "Me an' you can do the plannin'. I was to git ten dollars for what I done, an' I've been scart more'n ten dollars' worth, take it all around. Don't none o' the men you have to work for you ever tell?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Montcalm, "they sometimes do."

"An' do you ever hurt 'em?" queried Takum.

"No," replied Montcalm.

"So you never do nothin' to 'em?" said Takum.

"Oh, yes!" said Montcalm, "we do something to them."

"An' what do you do?" asked Philetus.

"Shoot them," answered Montcalm.

"I thought you said you never hurt 'em," said Takum in a disappointed tone.

"Neither do we. We kill them so quick it does not hurt them," gently replied Montcalm.

"Oh, I wouldn't tell nobody," said Takum earnestly. "I've hooked more chickens'n anybody in this hull country, an' I never told anybody but you."

At Takum's house Montcalm struck across the fields and was soon by Ratke's barns. In the shadow of the largest he paused and deliberated whether it were not better to leave the neighborhood. He knew that pursuit must have been organized for his capture. It was also possible that he had been recognized by Wingscheut, Sparks or the mysterious stranger whom he had rescued. Moreover, he had reason to fear the instability of Philetus. But Philetus might prove a better confidant than helper, especially after being impressed with the certainty of punishment for the first breach of confidence.

Montcalm decided to remain. He hesitated to leave her for whose approval, though it could not be gained, no sacrifice would have been too great. He told himself that, had she given him the least encouragement, he would have averted the misfortunes which were gathering about her and her relatives. He was tired of the life he was leading, with its trickery and deceit, its wronging of honest men. He would lay his plans, and at a few successful moves gather in the money which would enable him to live at peace with all mankind.

Strangely he felt the force of those words which that Sabbath night Manie had spoken to him concerning Ahab and the Syrian. He had made the covenant with Ben-hadad, but his Ramoth Gilead had not yet come. And would it come? With that apprehension by which the guilty spirit alone is haunted, he looked about him. In the peaceful air, undisturbed by a sound harsher than the note of the whip-poor-will, was no warning. The only foreign element in the quiet which reigned about the place was the turbulence which agitated the mind of one man.

The night was now well advanced. Some stars which had by the marauders been used as landmarks or timepieces, had changed their places or disappeared. The Pleiades had descended to the westward. The great dipper had lowered its handle until it appeared to be a receptacle toward which were falling myriads of glittering drops. Taking his way through the spruce, Montcalm raised his window and clambered in.

CHAPTER VIII.

PURSUING THE DEPREDATORS.

TOWARD morning the major was awakened by loud and repeated shouting. As passers-by had sometimes amused themselves by calling him up and cracking jokes at his expense, he did not at first respond to the summons. But the continuance of the shouting argued the occurrence of something unusual, and, hastily dressing, he went to the dining-room window.

In the road was a band of mounted men, the advance of which only could be seen by Ratke, while the main portion of the body was obscured by the evergreens. Some of the troop carried guns, several bore pitchforks, not more than one or two appeared unarmed, and these probably had revolvers.

"What is the matter?" inquired the major.

"Matter enough!" returned a voice. "Two horses was stole last night, and we're after the thieves."

"We've got some inquiries to make here," said Green, riding through the large gate and within a short distance of the house, where he was followed by the band. "You have men from every part of the country, and nobody knows whether they are honest or not. What we want to know is, where are they?"

"You may search the premises if you like," said Ratke. "All of my men are in the club-house. All but one," he added, "and he is above suspicion. I will call him."

"Trace, Trace," called the major, going to the door of Montcalm's room with a lamp.

"Come in," said Montcalm. "I thought I heard some one calling."

As soon as Ratke had left him, Montcalm sprang up, scraped together some patches of swamp muck which had not been noticed by his unobservant employer, and, wrapping them in a paper, threw them hastily into one of his trunks.

Stepping out of doors, he saw the thief-hunters, who were returning from the club-house.

"Hurrah, boys!" called a young fellow in a white hat; "everybody get on a horse."

"What is the use of making such a racket?" asked Green. "You let the thieves know you are coming long before we get to them."

"I am my own boss," answered the fellow in the white hat.

Montcalm ran to the horse-barn, unlocked it with the key which he had obtained from Ratke, bridled the steeds and led them out before he was rejoined by his employer. After assisting the major to get on the back of Bill, he too mounted, and they at once sped eastward toward the party, which they presently overtook.

The band halted in front of Takum's.

"We want to see where Phleet is," said Green.

Shout after shout was given, but Philetus did not respond.

"There is no use in disturbing him," said the major. "He has not enterprise enough for a horse-thief."

"Don't be too sure," said Green, proceeding to the front door and administering several loud taps.

"Who's there?" asked a female voice after the lapse of a few seconds.

"Where is Phleet?" inquired Green, ignoring her question.

"He ain't to home," replied Mrs. Takum. "He's gone to his uncle's."

"There, Ratke," exclaimed Green triumphantly as he neared the road. "He's gone, and right in the middle of the night. We'll take a look after him."

"It is probable that he is where he hadn't ought to be," said a red-whiskered man whose name was Holmes. "I shouldn't wonder at all if he's with the horses now."

Montcalm, realizing that it would be dangerous to allow suspicion to fall upon his subordinate, jumped to the ground and inquired, "What is his name?"

"Phleet," answered Sparks.

Rushing to the door of the house and giving it some kicks which threatened to tear it from its hinges, Montcalm shouted,

"Phleet, Phleet, if you don't come, we will kick down your door and drag you out of bed."

"Yes, I'm a-comin'," answered the trembling Philetus. "Don't be a-gittin' mad now."

"There," said the major, triumphing in his turn, "he was afraid to answer. He thought you were about to do him violence."

The band, unanimously agreeing not to disturb Takum further, continued their course, which they decided to direct through the swamp, instead of along the road which branched southward.

"Where have you been hunting?" asked Ratke.

"We've been all along the road by Lyme's," answered Holmes. "We turned the corner east of his house and went up by Rob Eliot's, and so around to Oakville and your house. But we have found no trace of the thieves."

"The funniest thing of the whole bisness is that they didn't leave no tracks," remarked Sparks. "There was a ways that the ground was all scraped up, places two or three feet across. But it didn't go far, an' then we couldn't find hide nor hair."

"In my opinion," said Holmes, "we had better stop at the house of every suspicious character. If we find them at home, very good. If not, we will suspect them. I think the men that took those horses are with them now. When I was a boy I had some traps stolen. There was a very light snow, and I started to follow the tracks of the thieves. I happened to meet an old trapper, and he said, 'I'll go with you, but we won't follow these tracks. There's no telling where they go to. We'll take the back track.' So we followed the tracks back. They led to a house not more than half a mile from the trapping ground. They were two surprised boys, when I caught them walking into the house with my traps."

"Had we not better divide our party?" asked Ratke. "Concentration of power is necessary when we wish to apply a prodigious force at a particular point. But in this case, where the resistance is apt to be small, we had better get at the short end of the lever, thus providing for much agility and extension of movement."

"I can't make out how we can get around any livelier by dividin' up," said Sparks. "I can move just as fast when I'm with somebody as when I'm alone."

"I am not to blame," returned Ratke, "because you cannot see why we can look over more ground by dividing our force, why we can stand a better chance to catch the thieves by watching a mile than a rod of territory. I suppose that they would not dare make any resistance if we found them."

"There's just where you're mistaken," replied Sparks. "They come a-chargin' up my lane to beat all, an' they drove me an' my boy to the house, in spite o' all we could do."

"Yes," said Wingscheut, "tey come a-charchin' up. Put, provitin' I hat hat a coot man vith me, I coot a kilt efery tam horse-tief."

"How many of them were there?" inquired Ratke.

"Vell," answered Wingscheut, "tere vass two in te first place. Unt von of 'em he run. Unt, provitin' my short lec vass crowet out long like it vass started to crow, I coot a caught 'im. Put I catched te otter von hiplock. Unt I trowet 'im. Unt, provitin' you ton't pelieve it, you can ask Sparks. Ten tere vass four more, tey come a-ritin' up. Unt von of 'em he was a pic feller. He vass proat unt he vass long. Unt he vass pic all ofer. Unt he hat plack viskers Come vay town here," said the German, drawing his hand across his waist. "Vell, ten I let te feller co vat I hat. Unt I hit te feller vat hat te viskers. Unt tey run teir horses pack, vippin' 'em like tey vass no man vant to pe pehint. Provitin' I hat a hat somepoty vat coot a het 'em off, tey vass cone up horse-tiefs. Unt, if you vant to know who te feller vass tat I trowet, I can tell you tat."

"Who was he, Wingscheut?" asked the fellow in the white hat.

"Vell," answered Wingscheut, "maype you ton't pelief it, put he vass Panicky."

The German's statement was greeted with a laugh of derision which silenced him for some minutes.

"That was a fine animal you lost, Sparks," remarked Ratke.

"Yes," said Sparks, "she was the best blooded animal in the county."

"You are mistaken," replied the major. "My Taylor has better blood than Madge T."

"They don't nobody else think so," returned Sparks. "Madge T. is by Wellington, an' Wellington is by Cyclone, an' Cyclone is by Mohammed, an' Mohammed is by the Duke of Argyle, and he was good for 2:26. Madge's mother was from Petoskey Chief, an' she could go in three minutes."

"Taylor has no blood as slow as three minutes," replied the major. "Taylor's sire was Aleck, he by King Henry, he by Maurice A., he by the Duke of Argyle. Taylor's dam was Matilda, sired by Cal, he by MarshalNey, he by Royal John. Matilda went in 2:28 on Long Island, and every horseman knows that Aleck could distance Wellington."

"The proof of the puddin' is in the eatin'," said Sparks. "Madge T. could always go by Taylor."

"Always?" said Ratke. "Sparks, did I not go by you coming from the donation at Osborne's?"

"Yes," admitted Sparks, "an' didn't you run your horses, too?"

"Taylor did break up," returned Ratke. "But when you regain possession of Madge T., bring her over and I will try conclusions with you."

"I'm afraid we won't race very quick," sorrowfully observed Sparks.

They had now passed through the swamp and were approaching a dilapidated barn, beyond which was an unpainted frame-house.

"Had we better stop here?" inquired one.

"Yes," was the answer. "They're hard customers. We better rout 'em up."

The crowd, stopping their horses by the front gate, called the name of Wallace and uttered with it many an unnecessary and insinuating remark. At last a window was raised, a head thrust out and Wallace inquired,

"What do you want?"

In spite of their want of respect for the place and its occupants, the party hesitated to answer the gruff interrogation. But Green, who was unscrupulous in wounding the feelings of others, boldly replied,

"We wanted to know if you was at home."

"I'm much obliged to you," said Wallace. "I like to be waked up out of a snooze to hear some half-baked nuisance ask if I'm to home. I s'pose you want to know next if the folks is all well."

So saying, he shut down the window, and it was only after some severe threats that the band succeeded in bringing him back for a second interview.

"There were some horses stole to-night," said Green, "and we thought that we would satisfy ourselves that you was at home."

"You see I am," replied Wallace. "Now I wish you'd go off and mind your business."

"Where is Ab?" inquired Green.

"Abed, where all honest men ought to be," returned Wallace. "Got any more questions to ask?"

"We don't know whether he's there or not," said Green. "Call him up."

"Ab, Ab," cried Wallace, "show these fools you're to home."

A cord bedstead gave forth a dolorous groaning, and directly after the face of Ab appeared at a chamber window.

"Now," said Wallace, "get out of here, or I'll let daylight through some of you."

This injudicious threat brought a shower of stones, which several substantial citizens, including Ratke and Holmes, in vain strove to prevent. Two windows were broken, a piece of one clapboard was split off and knocked down, and the house received other marks from the rocky bombardment. It was fortunate for Wallace that some of the younger and more hot-headed of the party were at the barn looking at his horses. They drew out an old buggy and rummaged through the empty bay and stable. They even led out the horses to see if one of them were not Madge T. or Green's Billy in disguise. But the protruding ribs and low hanging heads were convincing proofs of the non-identities of the steeds.

The morning was near at hand, and, tired and discouraged, the men retraced their steps across the swamp.

"If we could only get our hands on 'em," said a man from Oakville who had lost a valuable Percheron in the winter. "I'd like to see 'em hanging to an oak limb."

"The proper way to punish misdemeanor," replied the major, "is to execute sentence proceeding from a legally organized tribunal. The decisions of men unaccustomed to jurisprudence and unrestrained by the statutes are apt to be hasty. Your conduct toward Wallace illustrates my statement. You had not the slightest evidence against him, but you waked him up in the middle of the night, insulted him, and when he replied to your insults, stoned his house and threatened to do him bodily injury."

"There didn't any of it come amiss," was the response. "If he didn't deserve it one time, he did another."

"The greatest and most widespread danger to society," said the major, "is lawlessness. It is in the rural districts, in high places, among the legislators themselves. Citizens whose general morals are irreproachable, who read the Bible and strive to abide by its teachings, forget that they should remain subject to the powers that be. It matters not whether the act of disobedience be the spearing of a fish in May, the shooting of a quail out of season, or the illegal hanging of a horse-thief; the effect is the same, for it brings contempt of the law. The insubordination thus fostered, building upon precedents unintended as such by their authors, walks with mobs in cities, overthrows the virtue and very existence of states, and spreads panic and instability among the nations. We must not be rash in following our projects of vengeance."

"Rash, or no rash," said the Oakville man, "I'd help put 'em where they wouldn't do any more mischief."

"If I am along when they are captured," returned Ratke, "and any injury to them is attempted, I will defend them to the best of my ability."

"That's the talk," exclaimed the fellow in the white hat who was an admirer of Ratke's courage. "And I'm with you every time, Major. We'll turn 'em over to the law, and we won't give 'em anything more than a good sound drubbing."

"You'll see," replied the obstinate Oakville man. "If we can't hang 'em, I'll put some cold lead into 'em."

"Afore you hang 'em or shoot 'em," said Jake Sheppard, "hadn't you better catch 'em?"

At the western extremity of the swamp they stopped.

"Gentlemen," began the major, "we have made as thorough a search as we could under the circumstances. But we can do no more without organization. Random efforts will avail us nothing, In order to recover the stolen property we must plan, and plans are quite certain of failure when they are known to a strong and vigilant enemy. If the measures we adopt are understood throughout the country, they will be revealed to the thieves. I think we ought to choose a committee of five to direct our movements. This committee should have the power of making its deliberations secret or public, as it may deem proper."

"The major is right," said Holmes. "It won't do to let everybody know just what we are going to do. I move that we have an executive committee of five."

The motion was passed, and the party chose, as members of the committee, Holmes, Ratke, Sparks, Green and Montcalm, of whom the latter was nominated by the major. Ratke's house was selected as the location for a temporary committee room, and two o'clock that afternoon named as the hour of meeting.

The business concluded, the band dispersed. The major's farm hands, with the exception of Archer, who had been too sleepy to join the hunt, commenced to do the chores.

"Now, Trace," said the major after breakfast, "I am going to take a nap. You were disturbed of your rest. Come in the house and lie down."

"Thank you," replied Montcalm. "I slept well the forepart of the night, and I am not very tired."

"I know what is the trouble with you," said Ratke. "You do not want the gentler sex to suspect that you are so weak as to feel fatigue. I do not blame you. Go and lie down in the club-house."

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE AFFAIR ENDED.

THE deliberations of the committee lasted several hours. Ratke convinced his associates that the horses were hidden in the swamp, and that, consequently, the roads surrounding that portion near which the animals disappeared should be watched. The supervision of these roads, which had an extent of eight miles, was divided between the five members of the committee. Each member was to find enough men systematically to guard the part apportioned him

Montcalm cleverly secured the division extending eastward from Takum's. He also obtained permission of the major to engage his hands. Avoiding Sheppard and Wrengell, he secured the services of Daggett, Brown, Thompson, and that still more valuable acquisition, Archer, whom he promised some blankets and cigars and instructed to pass the night as comfortably as possible.

In some bushes near the road Montcalm left the blankets which he had promised Archer. At Break o' Day he hired two topers whom he found in Dr. Rorus' drug-store.

Jimmy Martin and old John Davis, the men whom he engaged, were chronic inebriates. They were harmless as doves, but not wise as serpents. They worked much of the time by the day, and money they valued solely as a means by which liquor was obtained. They accepted the offer of the committee-man, because it necessitated no hard work and because it promised better remuneration than common labor.

Montcalm knew that criticism would be made on his action in engaging such inefficient sentinels, but he was in a desperate strait which required the use of desperate expedients. It was possible for him in a measure to avert suspicion. In the presence of three listeners he refused their request to be supplied with whisky, saying that they must remain sober during the night. Moreover, he told them that, if they took a drop of the beverage with them, he should secure other help.

At dusk he posted his guards. Commencing at the point where his division joined that of Ratke, he placed his men in the order named : Martin, Davis, Archer, Takum, Thompson, Brown. Daggett.

These were, as he afterward claimed, all the sentinels whom he could procure. Archer's position was near a creek, the laggard waters of which were moving toward the first of a chain of lakes connected with the Huron River. Near him and leading toward the highway was an old road which had been used in the transportation of poles from the interior of the swamp.

"Here," said Montcalm, drawing the blankets from some alder bushes where they were concealed, "you will have a comfortable time."

"I hope so," said Archer. "Planting corn is hard work when you drive it."

"If you hear any disturbance," ordered Montcalm, "you call me. You need not stay on your feet continually. Once an hour, or once every two hours, you can go to the bridge and back. But do not let any one know that you are favoring your legs in the least."

"No, I won't," assured Archer. "Folks don't seem to realize that a laboring man gets tired. You spoke something about some cigars, Mr. Montcalm."

"So I did," said Montcalm, handing him a half-dozen of the desired gifts, which had a superior flavor to which Archer was unaccustomed. "I must go and look to Takum. Do you think he will do his duty?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Archer. "The trouble with Phleet Takum is, he's lazy. He'll never set the North River afire."

"How are you feeling?" asked Montcalm, as he joined Takum.

"Not very bumkum," answered the subordinate. "I was nigh scart to death las' night. I thought they was a-comin' right into the house an' goin' to drag me out. They'd hang a feller sure if they got their claws on him."

"You are right," said Montcalm. "But they will not get their claws on us."

"How be we goin' to help ourselves?" queried Takum. "They'll hunt the swamp to-morrer, and they'll have them horses as sure as preachin'."

"We will look to that," said Montcalm,

"I know what we can do," said Philetus. "You an' me can take 'em out up toward Will Archer. He'll be to sleep in an hour, an' thunder an' lightin' won't wake him. He's too lazy to stand for a sign-post."

"We will let them stay for the present," replied Montcalm. "I want you to do an errand for me."

"'Tain't far to go, is it?" asked Philetus. "Ever since las' night I've been afraid o' my shadder."

"Up past Wallace's," said Montcalm, taking two quart bottles from his pocket. "Carry these bottles under your jacket, just as you did the chicken. Give one of them to Davis and one to Martin. But do not say that I sent them. Make them believe that you came without my knowledge, and that I would not like it if I knew it. Be particular about this."

"Yes," assented Philetus. "But what are you goin' to do with the horses? They'll find them to-morrer as sure as preachin'."

"The first thing to be done," said Montcalm, "is to go with the whisky bottles. You must do exactly as I tell you now. I was patient with you last night, but I will stand no more such work. I want you to go there and get back as soon as you can. Remember, this is no time to steal chickens."

"I ain't had no hankerin' to since las' night," responded Takum gloomily. "Gosh all Friday! I wish I was out o' this. It seems to me I'd git them horses away."

"You recollect that I often had to warn you about talking too much," said Montcalm. "Do what I tell you and no more. Go with the bottles, come back and stay here."

"Yes," answered Philetus, "they won't nobody hear a yip out o' me, only Jimmy an' ole John an' you."

After satisfying himself that his threats and the fear of popular vengeance had impressed Takum with the necessity of caution, Montcalm went to his post, which was east of the swamp. He held a short conversation with each of several neighbors who passed him. Leaning over the broken-down gate in front of the unattractive house, he talked a few minutes with Wallace, who complained of the rough treatment which he had received from the band in pursuit of the horse-thieves. The hour of eleven was approaching when he proceeded toward the sentinels whom he had placed at the extremity of his division. Old John was standing in an attitude of meditation by the fence, with his hands grasping the top rail and his body unsteadily waving about. Unconscious that he was watched, he staggered to a jug and emptied a quart of liquid, a part into his throat, a greater portion down his shirt collar. With more volume than melody floated a song from Jimmy Martin, which showed that Philetus had faithfully performed his errand. Montcalm on his return stopped at Wallace's house and knocked. There was no light inside, but the door shortly opened and he was admitted.

"I was tired and I went to bed," said Wallace. "I'll light the lamp. Ab, get up."

The cord bedstead in the chamber groaned, and in a few minutes Ab appeared.

"We'll take a turn at seven up," said Wallace. "Draw up your chair, Montcalm."

"Count me in, too, Pa," said a large, rawboned, masculine looking girl, whose freckled face pushed through the opening door of an adjoining bedroom.

"Jule," exclaimed Wallace, "who told you to get up?"

"I told myself," replied Julia. "If there's any fun, I'll have my share, and don't you forget it."

"Those windows ought to be darkened," remarked Montcalm. "If I should be seen here, I might be accused of neglecting my duty."

"Here, you, Ab," exclaimed Julia, grabbing her brother by the shoulders and jerking him backward from his chair, "run upstairs and get a quilt."

"Don't be too smart, Jule," warned Wallace. "You may get set back a peg. That girl's a trump," he said to

Montcalm, as Julia disappeared in another room. "I wish Ab was like her. If she was a boy, they'd have to stand 'round for her. She and Ab don't always agree. They fight like cats and dogs, and Jule is about enough for him."

"Now, Ab," whispered Julia, meeting that individual in his descent from the stairs, "don't you take that old quilt in there for Mr. Montcalm to see. It ain't fit. You get the cat's-paw."

"I don't know nothin' about any cat's-paw," said Ab, aloud. "You can't make any cat's-paw of me."

"Hatefulness," replied Julia, giving him a push and running up the stairs.

Julia brought down the cat's-paw and lugged out the best quilt from the spare bedroom. These she put over the windows, and at Montcalm's suggestion looked about for something to fill the keyhole of the back-door. Passing by carpet rags and old clothing, she went to her box of choicest finery, and from it selected a red ribbon which she stuffed into the keyhole, taking pains to leave an end of it hanging down for her visitor's inspection.

"You and me can beat pa and Ab at seven-up. Can't we, Mr. Montcalm?" she said, smoothing the pendent strip of silk.

"They was rough on us last night," said Wallace, shuffling the cards with dexterity. "It beat all how they tore around. They marked the house all up with rocks, and turned the horses loose, and run the buggy out. They hit one of the wheels against something and cracked two of the spokes, and maybe three. It's a good thing they went just as they did. If they hadn't, one of them would have got a lead pill."

"Ab," cried Julia, "quit looking over my hand, or your ears'll catch a warmin'."

"Shut up," growled Wallace, his looks betraying an admiration which the severity of his language did not imply. "That's a girl such as you don't often see, Montcalm. She's helped Ab an' me a good deal. She's worked out for almost every one. She understands about the houses and barns and horses, and how late the folks stay up. That comes real handy."

"You bet I can help," put in the masculine Julia. "If anybody where I worked got up to watch pa and Ab, I'd rattle things around in the house so they could hear. Clubs is trumps, Trace. Ab, you look out or you'll get your chops slapped."

"You have engaged in a very profitable business, Mr. Wallace," said Montcalm.

"You can't tell me anything about the business," said Wallace. "The time I went on the raid over in Eaton I just got away with my life. They caught the horse and just missed me. The first thing after I go into it again, my house is stoned and my property destroyed. Oh, I've had experience enough."

"This venture is likely to be more profitable," asserted Montcalm. "You have already received twenty dollars."

"I've earned it too," replied Wallace. "Hacking away at them tamaracks and wading out to get to 'em ain't any fun. I noticed you didn't do much of it. It was small pay I got."

"It was better than raising wheat at a dollar a bushel," said Montcalm.

"No one but fools will grow wheat," returned Wallace. "I can get it easier from barns than from the ground. I won't have my ribs smashed by plow-handles to raise provender for some bloated bondholder. The capitalists have got it all their own way, and they wouldn't give a cent to keep us from starving to death. The laboring man has got to look out for himself. The rich ones won't look out for him. You can take five bushels of wheat from three or four bins, and it won't be noticed, but when you take a horse, there's an everlasting pow-wow."

"You can get your provisions that way," said Montcalm, "but you will want money for other things."

"Yes, Pa," cried Julia. "And I want some dresses and rings, and you promised me a breastpin."

"Oh, yes, you want," grumbled Wallace—"you want a good deal, but you won't get it. Montcalm, hadn't you better pay me for them jugs of cider that you had me take to Jimmy and old John? That's worth thirty cents a gallon—sixty cents."

"All right," answered Montcalm, as he felt in his pocket for some silver. "It is right that you should have it."

Presently Montcalm arose and stated his intention to leave.

"Not yet," said Julia, "not till you play another game of euchre. Pa and Ab are ahead of us now."

"It is impossible for me to stay longer," replied Montcalm.

"Now, we'll see," said Julia. "If I don't let you go, it ain't impossible."

"You must excuse me this time," said Montcalm.

"No, you don't," cried the unfeminine Julia, making a spring toward him and throwing her arms about him as he moved to the door.

"Smack him, Jule," said Wallace, and the daughter obeyed.

Montcalm, feeling very foolish and thinking that for once his flattery had brought him not the most pleasant results, writhed from her grasp and fled from the house.

"You'll come again, will you?" demanded Julia.

"Yes, I certainly shall," answered Montcalm.

"When?" asked Julia—"next Sunday night?"

"I cannot promise," said Montcalm. "I will come as soon as possible."

"If you don't come then, there'll be a racket," said Julia; and with this warning she shut the door.

"That'll make a fine woman for somebody," said Wallace. "Wouldn't she be the boss for a night-raider?"

"Perhaps," said Montcalm, "if he wished to get married. Ab, go up and see how Jimmy and old John get along, while I take a turn through the swamp."

Montcalm, as he had expected, found Archer wrapped in the shelter of some bushes, oblivious to his surroundings. His visit to Takum convinced him that he need have no fears concerning the faithfulness of that subordinate.

"Oh, Mr. Montcalm," whispered Philetus, "I ought to tell you somethin'. Will you be mad if I talk?"

"By no means," answered Montcalm. "Talk on. Phleet."

"There's some one a-gittin' ready to muckle us," said

Philetus. "I heard 'em a-talkin' together down yonder, an' they went in the tamaracks."

"I will go and see," said Montcalm.

His trip was far from satisfactory. There remained not one of the hired men who had been stationed along the road. He refrained from relating his discovery to the Wallaces, who, he feared, might be intimidated by the revelation.

"They're as quiet as they can be," remarked Ab, as the three men met. "That whisky and cider together laid 'em right out."

"We must hurry," said Montcalm. "We have no time to lose."

They took an angling course toward the swamp. When they reached the tamaracks they commenced to remove the sharpened trees in the manner which had so surprised Philetus. This road was shorter than the one which led to the hiding-place of the animals from the opposite side. It extended to an open strip, in the center of which ran the creek, whose banks were overflowed. A distance below was a boat which reached nearly across the stream. The men got into the boat. Montcalm pushed once with the paddle, and they stopped on the opposite shore. Twenty minutes later and they were untying the stolen Billy and Madge T.

The horses, apparently willing to leave the loneliness of their retreat for a common equine habitation, gave little trouble until they came to the creek, where they snorted and stood with their feet braced, yielding only to the persuasion of some long whips.

The creek crossed, they were led out, both at once, by the three men. Wallace suggested that Ab should rearrange the newly cut path while he and Montcalm attended to the stolen beasts, but the more prudent superior would not consider the proposition. With his own hands he replaced most of the trees and moved others which the Wallaces did not place to suit him. He scattered brush and fallen trees plentifully along the route, not, he said, so much for the purpose of covering the signs of travel as of inducing the searchers to keep away from the disguised road by going around the obstacles.

"Maybe you're in love with this work, but I ain't," said Wallace, as, after leaving the tamaracks, he was tramping through the water, which reached above his boot-tops. "This is fun. I suppose about to-morrow night the crowd'll come along and tear down my barn and burn my shanty over my head."

"We have no expectation of getting caught," replied Montcalm, expressing a confidence which he did not feel. "We had better go as silently as we can. Probably we and the guards are the only ones in the neighborhood who are astir, but it is best to use caution."

Had Montcalm acquainted the Wallaces with the facts communicated by Takum he might have been in his extremity deserted by his help, whose selfishness would have allowed no consideration for him to endanger their safety or that of their property. For this reason he encouraged them and quieted their fears, using tactics exactly opposite to those which he employed in the management of Philetus.

"Ah," said Wallace, when they had arrived at his barn, "go in and get that crank on the girt."

Ab soon returned, bringing a crank and an iron bar to which was attached a short chain. Wallace took the bar and inserted one end of it in a corner of the barn, while the other protruded through a post which was set near. In front of the barn was a long stack of hay, which appeared to rest on the ground. Montcalm in the mean time had laid down some straight, smoothly hewn rails, thus forming a tramway between the post and the end of the stack. Raising some locks of the dried marsh grass, he fastened an end of a short rope to either side of a car which supported the stack. Then he joined the short ropes to a longer one, which he connected with the chain by a hook, and next he set the crank on an iron bar. Montcalm and Wallace turned the handle of this contrivance, when the stack trundled slowly forward and stopped within a few feet of the post.

"There," said Wallace. "That's all I'll turn. I won't break my back over a crank."

The removal of the stack exposed to view a pit which had been dug underneath the barn. So carefully performed had been the work of excavation that, when the entrance of the cellar was covered by the hay, its existence would not have been suspected by one unacquainted with the secret; and neither about the barnyard nor in sight of it was visible a trace of the dirt, the transfer of which must have occupied some weeks.

"That work was well done," observed Montcalm.

"Thanks and compliments is cheap," answered Wallace. "I wish I had what pay I ought to have. I'll never work so cheap again."

The horses did not fancy entering the underground stable. The colt hung back, braced his feet, and was induced to go in only by the use of the whip, or as Wallace termed it, "the persuader."

The stack was pushed to its first position without the help of a lever, as the ground ascended toward the post.

"You had better get into the house," observed Montcalm. "You may be seen by some prowlers."

Montcalm visited the drunken guards from Break o' Day. He shook them, broke their bottles and jugs and complained bitterly of their neglect. While he was still shaking and lecturing Martin, he heard a long-drawn yell, which, as he instantly surmised, proceeded from Archer. With many misgivings he sped toward the spot from which the disturbance issued. Justice was on his track. Takum's only guaranty of trustworthiness was his fear; Wallace cared for self alone, and here was a new trouble, which he could barely locate, much less define. In front of Wallace's barn he met Archer, who was much excited.

"They've gone," said Archer. "They've got away with the horses."

"How do you know?" asked Montcalm, with an apprehension which he succeeded in hiding.

"Because I saw 'em," replied Archer, "and I thought I'd come up here and tell you."

Montcalm soon decided on his course of action. He would tell the Wallaces of Archer's disclosure, and prepare, when necessity demanded, to flee from the danger which menaced him.

"Where did the horses go?" he inquired.

"Up the road," answered Archer.

"Up the road!" ejaculated Montcalm in astonishment.

"Yes," said Archer, "they come out of the old road in the swamp where they used to haul fence-posts through."

Montcalm, relieved, though perplexed, left Archer on his beat and went to the station of Philetus, which was deserted. He called loudly, but two or three minutes elapsed before a faint response came from the swamp. Making his way through the tamaracks, which at that point were large and comparatively far apart, he found Takum, who was coming to meet him.

"Oh, Mr. Montcalm!" exclaimed Philetus, "somebody got 'em an' they'll find us! We're gone up! Great Augustus! I'm a goin' to Californy!"

"We are all right," consoled Montcalm. "Did you not expect that I would get the horses? If I had not taken them from the swamp, we would surely have been found out."

"Was that all?" said Philetus. "I heard somebody a-comin' through that road, an' I thought they'd found the horses. They raised a great hellaballoo an' run up this way. I didn't think you'd make such a noise, but it ain't none o' my bisness, an' I won't talk about it."

"Get back to your post," said Montcalm. "You must let no one suspect that you were frightened."

In the road Montcalm discovered the horses' tracks, and, following them along the highway, which was quite deserted, he ascertained to his surprise that they led to Ratke's barns.

As he was passing the club-house on the way to the family dwelling, his attention was arrested by the sound of voices and laughter, and as he stopped, he overheard the words of Daggett, who was saying:

"Didn't we have a time of it waking him, though? I poked him with a pole two minutes before he give a grunt. But he flew around lively enough after he did get up."

By nine o'clock in the forenoon a body of men and boys, to the number of two hundred, had assembled at Ratke's. Carrying a variety of arms, including rifles, shotguns, revolvers, rusty swords and muskets with bayonets attached, they proceeded in a body to the swamp, where they separated in order to facilitate their search.

The old men stayed on the hard land, while the younger portion of the crowd, among which were a few boys, struck out boldly for the tamaracks. But their ardor, as well as their persons, was dampened by the water, which for the greater part of the year encircled the great swamp, and against which, at that time, the highest rubber boots were an imperfect protection. The water poured over the boot-tops of the men. The brush scratched the bare legs of the boys, who had rolled up their trousers. All were annoyed by the bushes, which in many places were so thick that vision was limited to a distance of a few feet. One by one, wet, tired and discouraged, the searchers returned to the up-land, asserting that a horse would not venture where they had been, and that no one but old Ratke would have imagined the thing. With their zeal for the capture of the thieves considerably lessened, they returned to their homes, disgusted with their own folly in being drawn into any scheme projected by the inventor of the New Jerusalem.

Jimmy Martin and old John Davis boasted of how they secured the liquor in spite of Montcalm's precautions. This was an incident of the hunt, at which the people laughed heartily, and Montcalm was glad to be subjected to ridicule instead of suspicion.

CHAPTER X.

TWO KINDS OF BUD BLOSSOM.

The author whose ambition is that of the rural historian will not attempt scientifically to analyze the causes which led to the circumstances herein to be described.

To the reader it may seem improbable, but certain it is that John Wrengell was received with more favor by the Ratkes. The traditions which might have thrown light upon the subject were imperfectly kept. Brown, Thompson and Daggett, excellent authorities on farm-life and the hunt after the horse-thieves, forgot those trifling incidents, of which reminiscences would have assisted us in our speculation.

John and Manie began to be better acquainted.

Wrengell's manners and habits were undergoing a change, whether for the better is a question on which the student and the man of fashion would differ. He was entering the period which at some age is reached by most men, the epoch of the anxiety to improve the personal attractions. Had he possessed an opportunity he would have been tempted to barter a part of his hard-earned learning for a more perfect understanding of proprieties. At the church he saw Fred Loomis, and envied him his style. Dr. Rorus' clerk was not brilliant. Indeed, he seemed to be an automatic, imitative body, wound up for life without the troublesome complication of a brain. His walk was unmistakably that of the young man who is assured of his gentility, and his hat was tipped at exactly the right angle to be fashionable.

John, before going to Oakville to purchase a suit of clothes, took observations of Loomis' apparel. The dress suit, his first extravagance, was praised by the clothier as a perfect fit. John did not mistrust that the trousers were too short, or that the loose coat hung in wrinkles about his shoulders.

The Sunday morning after the important purchase he took extraordinary pains with his attire. But the clothes brush was filled with the lint of the club-house, and the blacking-brush, which had been used on greasy boots, would not impart to his shoes a perfect shine.

He was before the mirror, trying to smooth down an obstinate lock of hair, when Daggett thus addressed him :

" Fix it up nice, John. I would if I was in your place. If you go in the parlor now, you'll find her alone. She's singing, and all the rest of them are in the sitting-room."

John determined to make a terrible rejoinder, but before he prepared it, he was assaulted by Brown and Thompson, and he was unable to reply to them all. For the purpose of escaping the notice of his fellows he went to the orchard, and walked around it in pretended abstraction till he came to its western side. There, seated on the fence, he chewed splinters from the rails and waited for the keen-eyed Daggett to turn his attention elsewhere, so that his arrival in front of the house might not be seen by the fun-loving hired man. When this occupation became monotonous, he slid from his position and started across the orchard.

The warm May days had strewn verdure over the limbs of the apple-trees. Leaves had pushed out, and buds had developed to blossoms. Dressed in pink and white, the blossoms, stirred by a strong wind, posed in different attitudes, and at each ample swing cast off a portion of their loveliness. A few rods ahead of John was Manie, standing with her back toward him beneath a tree. About her, as if in homage, were falling the dismembered blossoms. As the wind lifted her hair and threw a shower of the white leaves on her shoulders, he thought it would be no misfortune, if he and she, like Una and the red-cross knight, could be lost in a wood,

> " Whose lofty trees, yclad with summer's pride,
> Did spread so broad that Heaven's light did hide."

She stretched her hand upward, trying to get possession of a bough which was beyond her reach.

"Let me help you," said John, stepping quickly to her side. "I will pull it down, and you can make the selection you wish."

John purposely held the bough so high that, to reach it, she was obliged to raise herself on tiptoe and remain very close to him until the desired flowers were obtained.

"I wanted these," said Manie, "because they are fresher than the others. These are just opened, while most of them are ready to fall. What do you think of our apple grove, Mr. Wrengell?"

"I think it is a kingly court," replied John, "in which reigns an absolute monarch. The advent of summer holds perfect sway over our fancy. Of all periods the beginning of a progressive era is most interesting. When a state or system has been established a considerable length of time, it is no longer able to draw the strongest admiration; but awakening life is never without its charms. That line of woods is now in its richest beauty. There can be nothing more picturesque than the spot where that dark green tree is set diagonally in front of the less deeply tinted background. As its fellows advance to the same stage of development, the view will grow less attractive. The reign of this scene around us over human sympathies is transitory, for those white petals are now falling. In a few days the trees will be clad in simple green, and in the autumn they must surrender their authority and yield tribute to those whom they have ruled."

"The summer brings to the orchard little loss of authority," said Manie. "You may prefer blossoms to fruit, but Phleet Takum's little boys will not neglect yonder tree when it is loaded with yellow pippins. There are seven of our hired men. Only one of them goes a rod out of his way to look at leaves and flowers, but they will all come trooping over here as soon as they are assured that harvest-apples are ripe. How many of the farmers stay in their orchards all day now? How many of them will keep away from them when it is time to gather fruit? You judge of an entire force by its application in one place. It has not the universality which you claim or imply that it possesses."

John was in a dilemma. He believed that he ought to continue the argument in order to appear to advantage before Manie. But he had learned that in a nervous condition, such as he labored under at that moment, he was certain to make statements which were fatal to his logic. Furthermore, he might, under the influence of excitement, utter some discourteous remark, which would nullify any good impression which he might have made.

"Are you going to meeting to-day?" he asked as Manie moved toward the house.

"I think so," answered Manie; "we usually go."

"Can I go too?" inquired John, while his shaking fingers were picking at a blossom-covered apple-limb.

"Of course you can," answered Manie. "Who is to prevent you?"

"But," persisted John, "can I go with you?"

"If there is room in the buggy you can," said Manie. "Nora, Aunt Maria and I can sit behind, and perhaps Uncle James will let you ride with him and Mr. Montcalm."

"No," exclaimed John in desperation, while a flush overspread his face, "I mean will you go alone with me?"

"Oh!" said Manie, "that is a different matter. Yes, I will go!"

John would have expressed his appreciation of the favor which he was receiving, but he had not mastered gallantry, and he was overwhelmed with a sense of his inefficiency as an escort. That which he could not speak he could act. Regard drew him near her, and the fear of repulse drew him back, so that he walked in a zigzag line across the orchard. He pushed aside branches of trees for her to pass; and, coming to some bars, he threw down all of them but the bottom one, which was caught at the end. He was tugging away at the unyielding board when Manie put an end to his strenuous efforts by stepping quickly over it.

John left Manie at the house and hurriedly went to the road. He did not dream of the ridicule he was preparing for himself by his excited manner and walk.

The drive to church furnished him the keenest enjoyment he had ever known. He was the escort of the most cultured, the most esteemed lady of that community.

Samson-like, he was rending the bonds of his evil fortune and bearing away the Gazan gate which shut him within the city of disrepute. From the pit of degradation he raised his head above its mouth and viewed the hills of respectability, the borders of which he hoped soon to cross. He could think of nothing to say, and, indeed, he was too happy to talk. The wind placed invigorating touches on his face, and the wood to the south, with its thin light-colored drapery and its flank of dark tamaracks, sent to him an inspriation which found fellowship with his already awakened feelings.

At the church he was unpleasantly reminded of his abstraction by the discovery that he had driven too far from the platform for Manie conveniently to alight. Wishing to atone for his lack of skill by a show of agility, he endeavored to clear the distance by a leap, but, as his feet caught in the lines, he was thrown on his hands and knees; and it was only by very energetic and undignified scrambling that he escaped falling to the ground. The boys and young men on the steps contented themselves by exchanging a few knowing looks. When, however, John had hitched his horse and awkwardly passed into the church, they commented freely on his behavior.

After this Sunday Ratke's favor toward Wrengell began to wane and Mrs. Grippin's began to increase. She admitted that John was a very good musician. He scraped his feet before he came into the house. He did not always wipe his hands in the center of the towel. He was, moreover, careful about disfiguring the butter-roll, and did not take more of the butter than he wanted on his plate.

It was the time of May-baskets, and parties hanging these souvenirs had been about the neighborhood at night.

John gathered some flowers from the swale which joined the swamp. He tied them with a ribbon which he had bought for that purpose, attached to them some poetry, hung them on the knob of the front door, rapped and ran to the road. These were the stanzas which Manie read:

"*We dwelt amid a marshy* haunt,
Where youthful oaks and elms bend low,
Where shade meets sun, where breezes pant,
Where plants their fellows' secrets know,
And laugh with joy and sympathize with woe.

"Rude were the hands which bore us hence
From that loved spot where we were born.
The lofty tamarack laments,
The grieving poplar quakes, forlorn,
The grass blade bows its head to weep at morn

"Death to the exiled flowers must steal.
Oh, let us not be spurned, but given
Cold water and this boon to feel,
That we from home have not been driven,
And on us falls the soothing rain of Heaven."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROOT OF AN EVIL.

THE summer was remarkably hot. July had arrived. The great swamp which, except in August, was usually too wet for a well-clad traveler to pass through with dry feet, was almost ungirded of its water-belt.

Ratke and his sister were preparing to start for Sharptown. The preceding sentence should be amended by the addition that Mrs. Grippin was actively flying about, while the major was conning a treatise of Lord Shaftesbury's.

"I'd like to know where you got the money to pay Green?" said the housekeeper. "You hadn't ought to be afraid of me. I'm not going to tattle about it. You've got secret all to once, haven't you?"

"I believe in maintaining silence when the occasion demands it," replied the major, "and it does in the present instance."

"I don't care so much who you got the money of," said Mrs. Grippin, "as what you had to do to get it. You said you couldn't find it, and you'd hunted all over, and you didn't tell me any different till the other day. I'm afraid you had to do something desperate."

"I found the money to pay Green," said Ratke. "Further than that I can tell you nothing."

"James Ratke," said Mrs. Grippin, breaking into tears, "I have slaved for you half my life. I have looked to your interests when you were careless of them. I have cooked for your hired men and scrubbed floors till I have nearly broken myself down. Look at my hands, James Ratke! They have been crooked doing your washing and mending. I never wanted any pay. I only wanted to know that you was getting along, and that I could have a place to stay when I was so old I couldn't work. And now, when the home is going, you won't even tell me how long before I am turned out into the streets."

"We will not believe that we are going to lose the place," returned the major soothingly. "An honorable man holds the claim against it. I did not mean to hurt your feelings, Maria, or to manifest a lack of confidence in you. I appreciate what you have done for me and I mean to repay you, as far as I can, by making you comfortable in your old age."

It was seldom that Mrs. Grippin was absent from the farm. This rare occurrence was welcomed with rapture by more than one whom it concerned. Archer was at liberty to help himself to bread and butter whenever he chose. Brown and Thompson could have each two pieces of pie without encountering a savage glance which destroyed their appetites. Nora sat by Montcalm and talked and laughed with him in a way which would have shocked her proper aunt had that lady been present.

"Come in this way, Trace," she cried, rushing to the parlor. "It's cool in here. Oh my! isn't this a nice place? I'll shut the door," she said as Montcalm entered. "Then they can't hear what we say. Oh, Trace, we haven't had a chance to talk alone for a good while. Aunt Maria does watch us so close. I'm glad she's gone. It's the day Uncle James promised to pay Uncle Si, and he's gone after the money. I tell you it's a lot of it. It's over $14,000."

"I should think Mr. Green would be afraid to have such a sum brought to his house," said Montcalm, "seeing that there are thieves about."

"He had to have it brought here," explained Nora. "It was to be paid in this house, and then he takes a good deal of pains not to be robbed. He has the strongest locks on his house, a lock on every door and a burglar alarm besides."

"That is caution itself," said Montcalm. "It is not often that a house has a lock on every door. Generally some of them are bolted."

"Oh, yes," said Nora, "that is the way with Uncle Si's. He fastens the cellar door with a hook. I remember hook-ing that when I was a little girl. Then the hook was higher than my head. Now it comes up just to my shoulders."

"You have forgotten," said Montcalm. "It lacks a trifle of being as high as your shoulder."

"What do you know about it?" asked Nora. "You never were there."

"I know by intuition," said Montcalm. "Second sight, perhaps you would call it."

"Oh, bother your second sight," returned Nora. "Don't try to fool me in that way. Are you going away before long?"

"Perhaps," answered Montcalm. "I have thought of telling the major that I can work for him no longer."

"And you'll send for me, as you said you would, when you get the store started." So saying, Nora sat in his lap and gave his collar a playful shake.

Montcalm looked down pityingly into her face. He had not at first meant to win her affections. Feeling his power, he had determined to test it, and its exercise had made her his slave. The lies which he had told her were for the purpose of giving her temporary satisfaction, but they had doubled the difficulty in disentangling himself without giving her the pain which he dreaded to inflict.

"Do not count too much on the store," said Montcalm. "I am not now in the best of circumstances, and it may be years before I can start in business."

"Why!" exclaimed Nora, a disappointed look creeping across her face, "didn't you mean what you said?"

"Oh, yes," answered Montcalm, as he felt unable to use the candor with which he had resolved to speak, "we will go just as we have intended. But be patient."

"It wouldn't need so much to start a store in a little village like Break o' Day," said Nora. "You say you've got a few hundred. So have I. I've got one uncle and an aunt that's well off. Right here are two checks, Trace," she said, coming from her bedroom with some papers. "They are for $500. Take them now. I won't want them. Aunt Emma gave me one and Uncle Si the other. You see I can *help*, and I feel just like helping to get along."

"No, no," expostulated Montcalm, thoroughly despising his own deceit. "I will not. I hope myself to earn the money soon."

"Oh, yes, take them," urged Nora. "It don't make any difference to me who has them, only I want to show you that I won't be a hindrance to you."

"No, you will not," said Montcalm sorrowfully. "Keep your money, Nora. By and by we can share our property equally. But wait until we are married."

At the sound of the last word Nora's face lighted up, and she pressed closer to him.

"When will that be, Trace?" she inquired. "We have talked about it, but we have never set the time. Once in a while I think it never will be."

"We must not be impatient," replied Montcalm. "It may be a year or two before I am ready to marry. If the delay interferes with your happiness, I will release you from your promise."

"You are tired of me," said Nora, her voice betraying her disappointment. "I was afraid you would be. But I won't beg for your favor if I die. I'll keep away from you, and I won't bother you any more."

"What is my little girl thinking of?" asked the miserable Montcalm, drawing her back to him. "Does she imagine I am tired of her because I will not take her money? I could not do that, Nora. I would hate myself for such an act. We can wait awhile. Neither of us are old. I will prepare a home for you, and then I want you. We will be happy then."

"Oh, I hear Aunt Maria talking in the dining-room!" exclaimed Nora. "She mustn't suspect that we've been in here together. Quick, Trace, slip right out of this door. I'll toss your hat out of the kitchen."

"You go in, Major," said Montcalm, as he neared Ratke. "I will care for the team."

"You may if you like," answered the major. "I am very hungry."

Mrs. Grippin suspected that many misdemeanors had been committed during her absence. Nora should have been taking care of the dishes instead of sitting in the parlor. The men had not scraped their feet when they came into the house, they had left the butter in bad shape, and some of them had taken two pieces of pie.

"Don't be so long," said the housekeeper, as her brother leisurely entered the house. "He'll be here in a little while. You want to be ready to do business with him when he comes."

"Precipitancy," replied the major, "is a common evil, and I intend that it shall not ruin me. If you think twice before you speak or act, you avoid many mistakes which you would otherwise make."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Grippin, "but if you are always thinking and never acting, it don't amount to much. I wish you'd eat so I can get my work done up."

After dinner the major went to the barn to talk with Montcalm.

"Come, Nora," said Mrs. Grppin. "Take hold and clear up the table. You're not very tired. It don't hurt you any more to work than it does me."

"Some one is at the door," said Manie.

"Come in," said the housekeeper, as she ushered their expected guest into the parlor.

"Are the folks all well?" asked Green, with a degree of politeness to which he was unaccustomed.

"Well enough," returned Mrs. Grippin shortly. "James will be in in a few minutes. You can make yourself comfortable until he comes."

Partly obeying the directions of the housekeeper, Green sat down, but he did not make himself comfortable. He arose to his feet, and strode about the room in an oval circuit, unconsciously following the same path through each evolution. When this became monotonous, he resumed his seat and tapped the floor alternately with his heel and his toe. As the major entered the apartment, he was again walking the floor.

"Why, Uncle Si," said Nora, following closely after Ratke, "you haven't been here in a long time. Why don't you ever come around?"

"Oh, I don't get around to visit much," returned Green. "I have a good deal to do."

"I should think you have a good deal to do," said Nora. "You never go anywhere only on business. If I was worth so much as you, I'd call around after my friends. You don't have so much leisure as lots of poor folks."

"That's what makes 'em poor," returned Green. "They have too much leisure."

"How much do I owe you?" inquired Ratke, with a mixture of dignity and civility.

"Fourteen thousand five hundred and forty-two dollars and ninety-two cents," answered Green.

"You are mistaken," said Ratke. "The amount is fourteen thousand five hundred and forty-two dollars forty-one cents, four and sixty-three hundredths mills."

"There ain't any mistake on my side," returned Green. "Collins is as good a lawyer as there is in Jackson, and he figured it."

"Mr. Collins may be good authority," Ratke rejoined; "but the figures are better, and I will show them to you."

"Oh, I'm satisfied with Collins's work," said Green. "He's always done my business, and he's always straight."

"No doubt you are satisfied," responded the major, "because his mistake, if sanctioned by me, would put a half dollar in your pocket. I oppose it, not for the half-dollar, but for the principle which is involved."

"I'll take my mortgage and go home," said Green. "If I can't get what belongs to me in one way, I will in another."

"Maria," called the major, "you and Manie come here. Here," he continued, addressing Green, "in the presence of three witnesses, I offer you fourteen thousand five hundred forty-two dollars, forty-one cents, four and sixty-three hundredths mills, or, on account of the difficulty in making change, fourteen thousand five hundred forty-two dollars and forty-two cents."

"What is this about?" inquired Mrs. Grippin, looking in turn from Ratke to Green.

"He wants to cheat me out of fifty-one cents," replied Green. "I tell him I'll take the mortgage and go home first."

The money-lender shrank back as he saw the change in the aspect of Mrs. Grippin. Her form straightened, her upper lip rose with an expression of ferocity, her long fingers gripped together like the talons of a destructive bird

"You, Josiah Green!" she said slowly. "You talk of cheating, you that never did anything but cheat!"

"Oh, Maria," expostulated the major, "remember he is a guest in our house. We must not disgrace ourselves by treating him with discourtesy."

"You can't run me, James Ratke," retorted the angry woman, "if you do run the rest of the town. 'Tend to your own business, and I'll 'tend to mine. You bought a cow of him, Si Green, when you couldn't get trusted anywhere else. You got money to help you with the mortgage on your place, and you cheated him out of it. You got wheat of him when your family was sick, and you said they'd starve if they didn't have help. Do you remember you came here and said you'd like to get a few pounds of butter, and you'd pay for it the next week? You've never said a word to me about that butter from that day to this. Now I want you to settle that account."

"I won't bother about the half dollar, Major," said Green. "Have it as you want it."

"Very well," said Ratke, "here is the full amount."

"When do you intend to pay me for that butter?" asked Mrs. Grippin, as Green was retreating to the road. "Si Green, you get up in church and speak, and say you are glad you chose the better way. What better way do you mean? A better way to smouse folks is the only way you've chose since I've known you. That's all the lingo you've got, and you can't make up another. I sit where I can see you in meeting. If you don't pay me for that butter, I'll look you right in the face as you speak. Then say you've chose the better way if you can."

"How much is it?" asked Green, turning suddenly about.

"There was four pounds and a half of the butter," answered Mrs. Grippin, "and it was twenty cents a pound. That would be ninety cents. I'll call it six shillings."

"Here," said Green, feeling that he deserved credit for generosity, "here is a dollar. That makes us square."

Fearing that Mrs. Grippin would make another demand, the penurious farmer hastened to the road, untied his horse by a few quick, nervous jerks and drove rapidly away.

Ten minutes afterward, in response to the call of a neighbor, Ratke went out to the gate and received a letter, the body of which, written by Durgenson, is subjoined:

"I dislike to speak about the sum I lent you. But the trouble is I am hard-pushed. I have got to have $4,000 the 24th of this month. After that I will get along two or three years without any more. Have it ready for me the afternoon of the 23d, when I will come to your house."

CHAPTER XII.

THE WELL WITH A BARREL CURB.

AGAIN at the dead of night Montcalm climbed from his bedroom window. Carrying a large bundle, he passed down the shaded walk and was soon on the route previously traversed by him and Takum. The sheep in the woods fled, as before, at his approach.

He came presently to a pond the dimensions of which had manifestly shrunk during the hot weather, for a dry, barren circle marked where its edge had been. He untied his bundle, spread its contents on the ground and threw off his coat and vest, for which he substituted a thick, padded jacket which gave him a robust appearance. When to this disguise he added a mask from which straggled a sandy beard, no one would have recognized in the ruffianly looking figure the genteel Montcalm.

In the capacious hollow of an oak the adventurer stored the clothing which he had removed, and with his lightened bundle again proceeded on his way. Ere he reached the lane which led to the barns of Green, he deviated from his former route. Turning to the right, he emerged from the wood exactly in front of, though at a considerable distance from, the church. In a few minutes he was stalking along the edge of the graveyard, and a brief walk took him to a large wood pile which was close to the house of the money-lender.

The premises had an aspect, not of thriftlessness, but of carelessness for everything unconnected with finance. The barns which sheltered the stock were well and neatly built. The house which harbored the family was paintless and old, the clapboards were loose, and some of the bricks had fallen from one chimney. It consisted of an upright and a long, low wing which lapped beyond the taller part of the dwelling. Montcalm was before the overlapping part and close to the outside cellar stairs. On the back-stoop were a swill-barrel, three swill-pails, some hoes and rakes and a rickety table made of a long box, on which sat pans and kettles. Whatever was useful merely in pleasing the eye or fancy was unnoticed by Green. Whatever added to his wealth received from him studious attention.

Montcalm went down the cellar stairs, which were in front of the stoop. His mask and padded jacket, annoying incumbrances in midsummer, he stripped off; and taking an auger from his bundle, he commenced to bore a hole in the cellar door, basing his calculations on the account which Nora had given him of its fastening. The noise, which he subdued as much as he could, might easily have been mistaken for the gnawing of a rat. He pushed through the orifice a wire instrument, and lifted a hook from the corresponding socket in which it rested. The door, which opened outwardly, he blocked with a stone, lest it should swing back and cause a strain on some attachment which he had not yet discovered. He bored a second and a third hole and cut out the spaces which intervened between them. Feeling through the passage thus formed, his hand came in contact with a string which he dared not critically examine. By means of the auger and a sharp knife he further enlarged the aperture until he could push through it his right arm and the fingers of his left hand, when, pulling the string tightly from him, he severed it with his knife and immediately after entered the cellar. An investigation showed the wisdom of his precautions. The string was connected with a burglar-alarm, which, if pulled, would have produced an explosion and might have brought ruin upon his enterprise, perhaps discovery to the intruder. Montcalm closed the door and lighted a small lantern. Boards which supported milk-pans were suspended from the floor above. In a remote corner of the cellar were some shelves which were in the course of erection. A broad-ax, a saw and some short boards which had been cut from the ends of the longer ones were on the upper of these shelves. Montcalm's curiosity was excited by a barrel, an end of which a few feet from the milk-shelves protruded some inches above the surface of the ground. On examination it was found to be the curbing of a well. When Green was poor, his ideas of economy told him that he could dig a well with less labor from the bottom of the pit under his house than from the surface of the ground; and, as he prospered, he provided water for his horses and cattle at the barn, but that necessity of his family was still carried from the cellar.

Montcalm donned his mask and padded jacket, and again his exterior coincided with the nature of his errand. A second flight of stairs led to the upper rooms, and up these Montcalm passed, bearing his lantern. He stopped in front of a door, which he pushed gently back and forth. He knew it was possible that this door, too, was connected with a burglar-alarm, but he did not think it probable, as an intruder could reach it only by passing through another, for the security of which greater than ordinary precautions had been used.

Gradually the door-bolt was worked from its socket, and Montcalm stepped into a small closet, from which he emerged into a larger room. Noiselessly going into the kitchen, he heard the light breathing of Green and his wife in their bedroom, which was, he concluded, fastened against intrusion. Retreating to and through the closet, he traversed the room above the cellar and came to a flight of stairs, up which he climbed. One of the boards, as he stepped on it, gave a warning creak, and he lifted from it his foot and set it on the next stair.

Two bedrooms were partitioned from the main part of the chamber. In one of these on the floor was a spring-bed on which was lying a man. As the man was long and the tick was short, about twenty inches of uncovered feet and legs were hanging over the bare springs. Beyond the legs were the lean body, the flaxen hair and weak, expressionless face of William Henry Harrison.

As Montcalm by one of his long legs pulled him crosswise of the bed, the half-wit exclaimed, "Oh, Misser Green, *'tain't mornin' yet!*"

"*'Tain't Misser Green,*" said Montcalm, "but it's some *one that wants to see Misser* Green. Tell him to come *up here.*"

Such was William Henry Harrison's terror at the rude awakening that he could only stare at the figure, whose broad shoulders and straggling sandy beard looked particularly savage in the light of the lantern.

"Call Green up here," said Montcalm.

"Oh, no," answered William Henry Harrison, "I no call. I feel sick."

"You must do as I tell you. Have him come up here."

"No. He want to sleep. He git mad."

"And I'll get mad if you don't call him," said Montcalm. "Tell him to come quick."

"He whip me," objected William Henry Harrison. "Take a big strap. Maybe he kick."

"Are you going to do as I want you to?" asked Montcalm, shaking him violently.

"Misser Green," called William Henry Harrison. "Misser Green, come up here!"

"Call him again," ordered Montcalm, after he had waited to no purpose for a response.

"Oh, Misser Green, Misser Green, come up here quick!"

"Keep still there, William Henry Harrison," shouted Green.

"Tell him you are sick," commanded Montcalm.

"Come up here," William Henry Harrison called. "I sick."

"Get well then," was Green's answer. "I guess you ain't in much danger. I want to go to sleep."

"Tell him you are awful sick," said Montcalm.

"Oh, Misser Green," wailed the fearful half-wit, "I awful sick. I goin' to die."

"You'll die if you don't shut up," replied Green. "I'll come up there and drive you through the floor. Now you keep still, I don't want to be awake all night."

"Tell him you are going to have a fit," was Montcalm's next order. "Tell him you know it."

"Oh, Misser Green, I goin' to have fit. I tell. I feel it. Oh, come up now!"

"I'll give you a fit if I come up there," yelled Green, thoroughly exasperated. "Now don't let me hear another word out of you to-night."

"Tell him you are going to have a hard fit," said Montcalm.

"Oh, no. He come up. He whip."

"Say it quick," ordered Montcalm.

"He say he kill me."

"And I'll kill you if you don't."

"Oh, don't kill. Hurt. Make blood. Awful."

"Then," said Montcalm, "tell him you are going to have a fit, and you know you are going to break things."

"Oh, Misser Green," cried the half-wit in desperation, "I goin' to have awful fit. I break window. I break bed. I break house."

Montcalm emphasized the appeal by knocking out some panes of glass, which went ringing below to the cellar wall and stairs. He also jerked the bed, breaking a crosspiece, and struck the wall so violently that a yard of loose plaster fell from the ceiling to the floor. Then he closed his dark lantern.

"What's that fool up to?" exclaimed Green, jumping out of bed and hastily putting on his trousers. "I'd rather have a man of sense around and pay him wages than to bother with an idiot. I'll be right after you, young man!" he threatened as he proceeded toward the chamber. "I'll thrash you within an inch of your life! You won't be having any more fits or fussing for one while. What is this?" he demanded, as his bare foot struck the plaster which had fallen in the main part of the chamber. "What fool's caper is this?"

He started suddenly backward as Montcalm, stepping from the door of the bedroom, presented a pistol at his head.

"Tell me where your money is," said the unwelcome visitor. "I can't stay here long because my wife expects me home."

"What money?" asked Green.

"The money you got to-day," replied Montcalm, assuming a tone which corresponded with his rough garb. "You can't fool me. I know you've got it."

"It's gone," said Green.

"You lie," said Montcalm, clutching him by the throat. "Let me know where it is, or I'll blow your brains out."

"It is gone," Green affirmed, "that is, the most of it. I took it over to Sharptown, and I got back just at dark. I've got two thousand dollars that I saved out for Osborne. You can ask Jane and she'll tell you the same."

"Show me the two thousand then," said Montcalm, as he pushed the slide to his lantern, "and don't you dare hang back, or play me any tricks. Here, you fellow on the bed, you lie where you are till I come back. And don't you stir. I'll lay this quilt over your legs, just in this way, and I can tell if it is moved. If I find a wrinkle of it changed, I'll shoot you when I come back."

So saying, Montcalm adjusted the quilt and followed Green, who in silence led the way to the cellar. As they were leaving the small closet, Montcalm's foot accidentally hit a pair of rubber boots, which went tumbling down the stairs.

"There it is," said Green, as he pointed to the cellar wall. "It's behind that stone. You couldn't tell it's loose, but it is. You'll find it all in a long pocket-book."

"I rather you'd get it," replied Montcalm, following him to see that nothing of value was left in the hiding-place.

The loose stone was near the unfinished milk-shelves and to reach it the men were obliged to step over a long board which lay across some saw-horses. Montcalm deposited his lantern on the board and vigilantly watched the execution of his order. Reluctantly stepping over another saw-horse and removing the stone from the mortar, which at first sight appeared to be solid, Green drew out a long pocket-book and handed it to Montcalm. They again stepped over the saw-horse, and Montcalm, opening the pocket-book, examined its contents. Green saw passing from him part of the riches the slave of which he had been and still was. For it he had plowed, sown and reaped, had taken the poor man's dollar and the widow's mite, had repeatedly outraged his conscience.

Catching a loose slab, he dealt a sudden blow on the head to Montcalm, who, staggering back, caught his legs on the saw-horse and fell. Green followed his advantage. He struck again with the slab, barely missing his aim; but as his weapon was clutched by the unknown burglar, he precipitated himself upon him. Montcalm, whose movements were impeded by his thick jacket, succeeded in twisting from underneath his antagonist and regaining his feet. His mask, which had become unfastened, hung loose about his neck; and Green partly unnerved him by giving a yell of recognition and pressing with renewed vigor to the attack. Having a poor hold of his opponent, and being in every way at a disadvantage, he felt his strength begin to fail. As he was crowded close to the wall, his hand accidentally came in contact with the broad-ax. In despair he seized it and struck. The weapon seemed hardly to touch the man on whom it was turned, yet that touch was sufficient to send him toppling over, extinguishing the lantern in his fall.

The cellar was in almost total darkness. The scanty light which came through the small windows, of which one was on the north side and one on the west, was lessened by screens and thick masses of overhanging vines. Montcalm threw aside the ax, groped hurriedly and found the pocket-book, with the intention of escaping before Green arose. But, as the seconds passed and there was no perceptible movement on the part of his late adversary, he felt that he need not anticipate immediate pursuit. He wondered that the stroke, which had but grazed the head of his opponent, should produce unconsciousness. An unconquerable desire seized him to learn what had been the result of the blow which he had delivered. The knowledge, however, could be at once gained only by an investigation, and from that investigation he shrank. While he was groping for his lantern, he heard a sound which filled him with an indescribable dread. It was the steady trickling of some liquid into the well. Never before had he been so nervous. He drew from his pocket a match, struck it against the wall, and dropped it ere his purpose had been served. With trembling fingers he took a second match and succeeded in igniting the wick of the lantern.

The sudden transition from darkness to light at first dazzled his eyes. He saw barrels, the unhewn wall, the milk-shelves, and lastly an object which he had previously overlooked. Green was lying nearly lengthwise of a plank, which descended toward the well, and which had one end resting on the curb and the other on an elevated and hardened bed of water-lime. His head was on the edge of the plank and nearest the well. A portion of the trunk and one arm also was on this support, and the other upper limb was beyond it, while the remaining parts of the body rested on the ground. No wound was visible, but from some source a small stream of blood was passing down a depression in the center of the plank to the well, where it caused that trickling which had so wrought upon the nerves of Montcalm. The depredator, as he turned over the prostrate form, dreaded what his action might reveal, yet he was not prepared for such a spectacle as met his gaze. The upper portion of the right side of the forehead, including the skull and a thin section of brain, had been cleft and now hung suspended by a piece of skin. Laid bare by that destructive blow, the cerebrum showed its peculiar formation, though the convolutions of its exterior were partly disorganized by the leveling of the ridges. Much of the gray matter had been shaved from the surface of the cut, or crowded into the irregular furrows; so that, mingled with it, was the white from which the power of transmitting nervous force had been suddenly and unexpectedly wrested.

A chill passed over Montcalm, which was not wholly a reaction from excessive heat generated by his physical struggle. But a few minutes before, and that cloven skull on which he was gazing had been the habitation of a living intellect, that amorphous mass of brain had been performing its normal functions; along those disfigured ridges had been passing thoughts, which, perhaps, related to self and self-aggrandizement, but which were those of a fellow-being. What though the reflections had been of a mean and penurious character? What though they had been on money and usury, on the oppression of the poor? The interruption of their existence was no human right, and woe to him by whom they were destroyed. Montcalm could scarcely believe that the pasty substance which riveted his attention was not even then the nursery of plans for revenge upon him, that sight had fled from the eyes, that the open mouth was not about to denounce him for his crime. The monotonous trickling into the well prolonged the spell which bound him, as a sameness of sound, by holding the external perceptives, sometimes prevents warning of the approach of deceit and prepares the way for the capture of the reflective faculties.

With an effort he turned from the senseless body and started toward the outside door. As he did so, he stumbled over one of the rubber boots which he had knocked down in his descent to the cellar, and which had probably been long thrown aside by William Henry Harrison, for they were large and full of holes. It was instinct, instead of deliberative caution, which prompted him to draw on the boots and walk several times across a strip of sand, thus making it apparent that the murderer was a large man, or at least had large feet. The skilled depredator, who had mastered the details of his profession, and who habitually had them in readiness for his use, was actually passing from the scene of the murder, leaving behind him the lantern and the burglar tools, when he heard Mrs. Green call anxiously to her husband. That cry in a measure loosed him from his lethargy of mind. Gathering up his shoes, the tools and the lantern, he emerged from the cellar, and walking around to the front of the house, proceeded an eighth of a mile up the soft road to the southward, after which he continued his way on the grass. Then he climbed into a meadow lying between him and the wood which he had traversed in his approach to the house. A large, low stump was in his path, and on it he seated himself with no concern as to the advisability of his action.

This was, indeed, strange conduct for one whose interest it unmistakably was to flee from a neighborhood which might at any moment become dangerous. Possibly the sound of pursuit might have roused him, might have led him to take measures for his safety; but it did not come, and listless and dejected, he kept his seat.

The intervention of the barns kept him from seeing the house, in which and in whose occupants alone he was interested. Crossing the lane and reaching the spot where he had made his exit from the wood, he was able to view Green's dwelling. A light was in the bedroom in which had slept the late master of the house.

It soon passed from Montcalm's sight and reappeared from a window of the upright. Again it was lost to his view, and again it was visible as it entered the chamber and shone from the room of William Henry Harrison. It was plain that Mrs. Green was making a search for her husband, and probable that she would not abandon it until she found him in the cellar. Montcalm had no curiosity or inclination longer to stay so near the place where he had committed his felonious deed. So, picking up his bundle, which, as may be supposed, was indifferently arranged, he trudged slowly through the forest. And now, for the first time, he experienced a fear, which approached certainty, that his guilt would be detected. It was not the abject terror of the coward. It was the conviction of a brave man who was willing to struggle when there was hope, but who believed that he was menaced by odds which it was useless to resist.

By the edge of the pond he halted. His mind, in that condition of vacillation which follows a severe shock to conscience, had veered from indifference, or rather stupor, to despairing expectation. In an indecisive conflict reason and imagination contended as to whether the monotonous night sounds were common and natural occurrences, or the ominous portents of coming evil. To him the croaking of the frogs, the low groaning and high wailing utterances of which came incessantly from the pond, seemed to be an arraignment against which he could made no defense.

He removed his outer garments and put on in their places those which he had stored in the oak. There was no concealment which he considered safe for the appliances of burglary and the evidences of murder. Every location which he thought of had its disadvantages. The open fields were being plowed and cultivated, the woods were rambled through by hunters from Sharptown and Oakville, the swamp was nearly dry and was daily visited by berrying parties. Bringing his irresolution to an end, he put them all, the tools, disguise and clothing, including the rubber boots and his shoes, inside the tree. He placed his hand to his forehead. The touch was disagreeably harsh, for his palm was coated with dried and stiffened blood.

Passing over the verdureless circle to the deep hole where the remnant of the pond remained, Montcalm thrust his hand into the water, that the congealed life fluid might be soaked and detached. He applied also some of the roiled liquid to his forehead, forgetting that little more than a stone's-throw from him was a clear spring.

As he left the pond, he reflected on the change which the night's events had wrought in his prospects. He had meant to abandon evil. While he was in his career of thieving and swindling, he had marked out his intended course. He would first accumulate a competence. Then he would marry some virtuous girl, between whom and himself existed a strong affection, and he would live a life of morality, even religion. Vanished was that dream of happiness. Judicious and good courtship requires serenity. How could he talk the language of love with such a secret weighing upon him, when every instant there posed before him a vision with cloven forehead and protruding brain? He had been engaged in wholesale trickery and theft, but blood he had avoided. And now it had smeared his clothing, his hands and, worst of all, his memory. An itching sensation was between the fingers of his right hand. Mechanically feeling with his left, he found a snake-like body, an extremity of which was imbedded in the skin. With a jump he threw from him a leech which must have become attached as he bathed in the pond. It was fully a minute before he realized by how trivial an object he had been frightened. Again he encountered the sheep, and again they fled before him. The act to which he had previously given no significance he now interpreted as an indication that the very brutes avoided his presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT."

RATKE and Montcalm attended the inquest over the body of Josiah Green. Men were standing on the shady side of the house, on the two porches, and strolling about the yard. Justice Sparks had ordered the outside cellar door to be closed, that the body might not be tampered with before the official examination. The cellar would still have been easy of access had not Sparks nailed a board over the hole which had been cut by Montcalm, and which might have admitted a hand to lift the fastening hook.

"How do you do, Major?" said a large, slightly corpulent man, with long chin whiskers, a rumbling voice and a breath which was tainted with whiskey.

"How do you do, Dr. Rorus?" responded Ratke.

"This is a sad affair," observed the doctor, "a lamentable happening, a bad job. Terrible, terrible terrible," and Dr. Rorus raised his eyes aloft. "A man, a fellow-being, struck down, cut off in the very noontide, or, as you might say, meridian of vigor." At this point the physician took an uncertain step and waved his fist in the air.

The major, whose own pomposity of language was unconsciously caricatured by Dr. Rorus, did not fancy listening to the drunken harangue, but he was obliged either to tolerate it or to beat a retreat. His friends had noticed that immediately after he had met the doctor he was less pedantic in his conversation, and his philosophical and historical allusions were less frequent.

"Have they found any trace of the assassin?" asked the major.

"Strong evidence," responded the doctor, "very strong. There was a conspiracy. The victim was called up in the middle of the night and was never seen alive again.

He was called by a certain individual that I won't name now."

"They will not convict William Henry Harrison on such proof," said Ratke. "I hope they have stronger evidence than that."

"The murderer," said Rorus with his customary redundancy, "the homicide, the execrable monster, the villain will be punished and put in prison and made to suffer. With whom is he dealing? With you? No. With me? No. With a weak man? No. With that mighty aggregation, that great mass of power, the commonwealth and the State of Michigan. Oh, the people of Michigan are a wonderful people. They have developed and grown up to greatness. Plenty of hardship, plenty of enemies to fight. There is, or was when they grew up, the Indian, the bear, the wolf, the panther and the hard winters and—poverty and—hard labor, terrible hard and—the fever and—ague, the rattlesnake and—hardship. The Michigan boy has the enterprise. You can't beat him. Best in the world."

"Where is Sparks?" asked Ratke. "I would like to see him."

"Can't say," said the doctor. "Where there's a slight breeze, there's a cause for it. Where there's a big wind, there's a good deal more. Evidence must have, has got to have, facts behind it."

"I understand," said the major. "We will talk this over some other time."

"There is no denying the fact, Major," declared Rorus, detaining Ratke by clutching his sleeve. "Brace against it and it will push you back. Try to shove it along and it will kick. I will give my drug-store, and my practice, and my diploma to any scholar, or set of scholars, who will disprove what I say, or demonstrate that it isn't so, either one, mind you, either one. There is a chance for somebody, a big chance."

"Precisely," acknowledged the major, glancing uneasily about, but disliking rudely to leave his tiresome companion.

"I claim," said Rorus, "I assert positively, without a tinge of doubt, there was no profit in that deed, that atrocity, as you might term it if you was disposed to give it a hard name. Oh, I don't believe in being mealy-mouthed with these rascals. In the first place there was no profit to the killer, the murderer I mean, to be more explicit. He will go to some saloon, and he'll drink. Then he'll gamble, and he'll lose what he's got, and he'll fight. And of course, as he's drunk, he'll get whipped and get a black eye. So you will admit, Major, there is no profit in a black eye. I claim, and I defy any man to prove to the contrary, aye, I challenge the world, there was no profit in it to Green. If there was, where was it? There was the house broken into. There was the $2,000 gone."

"Exactly," remarked the major with a sigh.

"Morality pays," pursued the doctor. "That is the teaching of the greatest philosophers, and thinkers, and orators, and smart men of the present day, and of the past, and that ever lived, of Aristotle, and Epictetus, and Bacon, and Socrates, and Pluto. Oh, that Pluto was a wonderful man. His philosophy is mild—and gentle—and beneficent and pleasant."

"If ever you fall into his dominion," observed Ratke, "you will find it not a pleasant one."

At this juncture, to the major's joy, he was approached by Sparks and informed that his testimony would be required, and that the jury, the witnesses and the officers of the inquest were to go through the house and view the cellar before the outside door was opened for the admission of the crowd. Sparks carried a lighted lamp in order to help their observations.

"Here are his tracks plain enough," said Holmes. "He wore rubber boots."

"I tracked him down south in the sand as much as forty rods," said the sheriff, whose unpretentious manner up to this time had concealed his interest in the tragedy. "Then he went to one side. There was a ways where the grass looked as if it had been disturbed. After that I couldn't follow him at all."

"It's queer he should go in the sand," commented the prosecuting attorney, a sleek young man who had red cheeks which were evidently made so by dissipation. "He ought to know he could be followed there."

"Murderers don't think of such things," said the sheriff. "They're generally in a hurry. It's some little thing that they forget that gets them caught. I wonder what size those rubber boots were. We can measure the tracks. Who's got a rule?"

The cellar door was now opened, and those who were waiting entered. The jury with Rorus surrounded the body and drew from it the sheet by which it had been covered.

With a copy of the statutes in his hand Sparks administered the oath to the six jurors.

"Here is what done it," said the justice, picking up the broad-ax after he had performed the official duty just mentioned.

"Terrible blow," ejaculated Dr. Rorus, "terrible. Crashed through the cuticle, the cutis, the frontal bone, the parietal bone, the arachnoid, the dura mater, the pia mater and the cerebrum. Intelligence, in a moment, in a second, in a half of a second, or less, for it was done instantly, destroyed, stopped, or, more properly, used up. Did you ever think what a slippery thing mind is, Major? Intangible, incomprehensible. You can't get at it. You want to put it under a microscope, but it isn't there. You grab for it, but it gets away. Whenever you put your hand on it, it slips out just like a greased pig."

So eager were the spectators to view the proceedings of the inquest that they seriously embarrassed the jurors in their deliberations and crowded them almost upon the body of Green. The annoyance at last aroused the displeasure of Sparks, who ordered two constables to clear a larger place for the accommodation of the court. The retreat was slow, like all forced backward movements of a crowd. Those who were behind had no inclination to move farther away from the object of interest, and those who were in front were by them prevented from doing so. Finally motion was imparted to the sluggish mass, which, reaching beyond the door, settled back with the rearward part resisting the retrogression. One of the lookers-on, who struggled most obstinately against yielding his position, was crowded towards the door; his heels struck the barrel which served as a curb, and he was precipitated to a sitting posture. Unfortunately for him he was a lean man, so very lean, that, doubled up as he was, he shot inside of the barrel, where, helpless and clamorous, he remained with his chin barely above water and the soles of his feet and the top of his head forming equally elevated slopes. The excited throng pressed about him and drove him farther into the well, but he was finally rescued, and the investigation proceeded.

When the dead body had been critically examined, it was wrapped in the sheet and removed to the ground floor. Sparks led the way to the room directly above the cellar, where the testimony was to be taken.

"Gentlemen," said Sparks, "we've met to-day to do our duty, and that's what everybody orto be willin' to do. One of our neighbors has been slayed almost before our eyes. Now we want to find out who done it, and what he done it for. Folks'll expect it of us, consequently that's what we orto do."

Sparks now proceeded to the examination of witnesses. Dr. Rorus gave straggling testimony relating to the organs affected by the wound, to the time and to the immediate cause of death. It was to no purpose that the sheriff and the prosecuting attorney bade him confine his attention to necessary facts.

Ratke was the next witness to be called. The preceding day he had paid Green fourteen thousand five hundred forty-two dollars and forty-two cents. All except the forty-two cents was in paper. He had given paper because it was the cheaper currency and it was what he had borrowed. After he had paid him, Green drove toward home, and that was the last time he had seen him alive. When asked by the prosecuting attorney whether there had been any ill-feeling between him and the deceased, he admitted that there had been. When questioned as to its nature, he said substantially that, as his neighbor was dead, he could not with propriety explain their trouble. He was liable to prejudice. The account which he would furnish might be biased. A counter-statement from the other party, therefore, would be necessary to give the jury a correct idea of the circumstances. That statement it was impossible to obtain. He, consequently, must be silent respecting their relations. He could only inform them that, however intense or unjust his animosity, it never would have prompted him to injure in person, reputation or finance the victim of the recent tragedy.

Mrs. Green was nearly overcome by grief, and the jury allowed her to tell her story without being subjected to many questions. She was quite deaf. She had been awakened by her husband in the night. Green said William Henry Harrison wanted him to come upstairs, and she, herself, could hear the calls, though she could not understand them. From her husband she learned their import. William Henry Harrison said that he was sick. Then he said that he was very sick and that he was going to die. Next he said that he was going to have a fit and that he would break the house. He broke the bed, knocked out some window lights and jarred loose a lot of plaster. Green at last went up to see what was the matter. She waited for him a long time, but he did not come. After a while she became alarmed and ascended to the chamber. William Henry Harrison acted strangely. She asked him where her husband was, but he returned an answer so low that she could not hear him. She thought it was a whisper. She insisted that he should speak, and he was still obstinate. She tried to pull him from bed, but she was not strong enough. Then she endeavored to haul the clothes from him. At that he resisted and even acted mad. She never saw him so violent before. Whenever she moved the quilt which was over him, he carefully replaced it again. He would fold it and put it over his legs, and she saw him arrange it so that a wrinkle would run across the center. As she continued her attempts to arouse him, he grew frantic, and she was afraid longer to stay by him. After hunting through the house she went down cellar and found her husband. She could not tell what she did during the next few minutes, but she was sure she did not touch the body. When she recovered from the shock sufficiently to think and act, she proceeded to Mr. Holmes's house and awakened him. He, with another neighbor whom he aroused, came home with her, and watched in the cellar until morning.

"The next witness I shall perceed to call," said the justice, "is William Henry Harrison Hibbard."

Gently pushed forward by several men, William Henry Harrison took the chair.

Sparks gravely looked down at the law-book and repeated these words: "William Henry Harrison Hibbard, you do solemnly swear that the evidence you shall give to this inquest concernin' the death of the person here lyin' dead shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothin' but the truth."

The half-wit stared stupidly at the justice, but made no reply.

"The court is waitin'," observed Sparks. "We want you to speak up."

Still the witness did not answer.

"We're in a hurry," said Sparks. "Do you swear it, I say?"

"No," replied William Henry Harrison.

"What!" ejaculated Sparks, "you won't tell us? Now I ask you again. Do you swear to tell the truth?"

"No," said William Henry Harrison, "I no swear. Wicked, awful."

"We do not want you to swear or say anything bad," said the major. "We want to know if you will tell the truth."

"Yes," was the response. "I no lie."

"Now, William Henry Harrison Hibbard," Sparks began, "we want you to tell us somethin' about the murder. Some think you know more about it than you care to tell. They kind o' think you know who it was that hit 'im."

William Henry Harrison's terror of the preceding night was revived. He remembered the dark-lantern, the hideous face which had peered into his, the great shadow which had been thrown on the ceiling and the threats which the ferocious intruder had uttered. He drew down his head and shoulders and cast an uneasy glance toward the door which led to the cellar.

"I want to ask you, William Henry Harrison," said Sparks, "what did you do as you did for? What did you want to call Mr. Green up there for when you knowed somebody was a-waitin' to kill 'im? There was nothin' fair about that. It wa'n't as you'd like to be done by. Answer me now. What did you want to do it for?"

Poor William Henry Harrison, incapable of defense, could only stare in mute appeal.

"If you don't answer me," threatened Sparks, "I shall take legal perceedin's agin you. What did you want to do it for?"

"I dono," responded the half-wit.

"Yes, you do know, too," persisted Sparks. "If you called him up there, you know what you called him for. You orto be ashamed o' yourself, a-doin' like that. There he'd fed you an' kept you an' give you your clothes, an' you had to up an' play that mean trick on 'im."

"Young man," said Dr. Rorus, in his most resonant bass, "do you realize the position you are taking?"

The prosecuting attorney here objected to Rorus's questioning the witness.

"Do you know," persisted the drunken doctor, ignoring the objection, "that you are in insurrection against, aye, assaulting the statutes of the Peninsular State? For, when you stand in the way of justice, you are assailing the whole. Do you think the people will stand that? Why, my dear sir, you never heard the motto of Michigan, did you? It is 'Tuebor'—I will defend her. And, when the young men of Michigan say, 'I will defend her,' they mean it. They are ready to fight for her liberty and her rights and her civilization. At the first menace they would crowd up by the dozens and the hundreds and the thousands and the millions. Now answer instantly."

The frightened witness slid to the side of his chair as far from his interlocutor as he could get without leaving or moving his seat. The prosecuting attorney again protested that Rorus had no right to question the witness.

"Rules are for use, sir," said the doctor—"for use when they're needed. We don't need that rule now. Young man," he continued, addressing William Henry Harrison, "you are liable to be arrested for conspiracy, to be put in Jackson inside of stone walls, and have men ready to shoot you if you try to run away. I will have a man come for you now. Your honor, send a constable for him."

"Rorus," interrupted the major, "you are drunk or you are a fool. Your honor, if you will allow me to question the witness, I think I can extract the information you want. Now, William Henry Harrison," he said, turning to the half-wit, "I will let none of them hurt you. I will keep them off. You like tobacco, don't you?"

"No like now. No like nothin' now."

"But you will like it when we go away," said Ratke kindly. "Jim, let me take your tobacco box."

The young fellow who at the hunt after the horse-thieves had been conspicuous in the white hat handed Ratke his tobacco box. William Henry Harrison, whose scanty supply of tobacco had been partly stolen from Green and partly bought by pennies which he had accumulated, took the box and hesitated.

"You had better take it," said Ratke. "You may not have another chance to get tobacco."

Thus urged, the half-wit transferred the tobacco to his pocket.

"If you will answer a few questions," said the major, "you can leave us and be away from these men. Then, when I go to Break o' Day, I will buy you a pound of tobacco. Now, I would like to know if any one came to your room last night."

The allusion to the circumstances by which the half-wit had been so frightened again made him incapable of utterance. His terrified looks and shrinking posture indicated that he would give no evidence.

"Oh, you ought not to be afraid," said Ratke, "I won't let anybody touch you. What kind of looking man was he?"

"He big. He awful."

"There," exclaimed Sparks, "now we've got a clue. If you can git him to tell who he looks like, Major, it'll be a big point."

"Holmes," said the major, "hand me your tobacco box. Have a chew, William Henry Harrison. Did the man have whiskers?"

"Yes," responded William Henry Harrison. "He have whissers, just like Misser Sparks."

This unexpected reply drew the general attention to the justice and brought a flush to the judicial countenance.

"Tell me what he did," said Ratke.

"No," said William Harrison. "He say he kill when I tell."

"Let him come," said Ratke assuringly. "I will give him the hardest thrashing he ever got. You don't think he will hurt you when I am here, do you?"

"No, I 'fraid of no one when you here. He come when you go 'way. Come when nobody here. Night. He shoot, kill, hurt, make blood."

"How do you know he will hurt you?" asked the major.

"He say so. He come las' night. He pull my legs. He say I call Misser Green. I say I no like call Misser Green. He git mad. Then he say he hurt I no call Misser Green. He shake me. I call Misser Green. Misser Green git mad. Man he make me say I sick. I have fit. I break things. Misser Green he git mad. He come up. Man he lay quilt on my legs. He say I move quilt he kill me. Man he scare Misser Green. Misser Green he go with man. Miss Green she come up. She pull quilt. I 'fraid man come. I pull. I 'fraid now."

"That will do, William Henry Harrison," said the major. "You have been a good witness. You must admit, Rorus, that he has told a not improbable story. It is not strange that he should be compelled to do as he did by the assassin, who was certain that the course which he adopted would bring Mr. Green to the chamber. Besides, William Henry Harrison is not capable of inventing the account which he gave."

"We've heerd all the testimony we can git at," said Sparks, "that is, so far as we know. Now, honorable jury, I want you to decide this question. An', while you're about it, git it right if you can. This lookin' a thing over an' then gittin' it wrong after you've had the fussin', I don't think much of."

The clerk, with the help of Dr. Rorus, prepared the inquisition, to which the jury subscribed. The document stated that "The said Josiah Green came to his death between the hours of one and two o'clock, on the second day of July, 187—, in the cellar of his own house, by means of a broad-ax, in the hands of a person or of persons unknown, and that the immediate cause of death was cerebral hemorrhage inducing paralysis of the nerve centers, asphyxia, cerevuesisms and coma."

Mrs. Green's neighbors eradicated the traces of the murder from the cellar. The broad-ax they gave to Sparks. Back of the barn they carried the plank, with its discoloring stripe of dark red. They dipped dry the well, the water of which was bloody and loathsome as that of the Egyptian streams over which Aaron's rod was stretched. It could never again be used, for though it would once more be clear, the sickening thought of the tragedy which had given it that crimson tinge would appall him who should presume to drink from it. William Henry Harrison was obliged to carry the family supply of water from the barn until another well could be dug.

"Trace," observed the major, after they had passed the church on their return to the farm, "you remind me more and more of your father. When there was a general struggle to obtain a petty object, he never joined the rabble. He was willing that others should go before him. At Green's you sacrificed your curiosity to the curiosity of others. You might have crowded up and viewed the body, but you did not. I do not believe you went into the cellar to-day."

CHAPTER XIV.

MONTCALM FINDS DANTE INACCURATE.

On the second night after the inquest Montcalm fell into his first slumber since the nocturnal expedition which had robbed him of Nature's restorative and had deprived Green of mortal existence. In that state in which the reasoning faculties are yielding to the need of rest, the gradual transition from balanced consciousness to uncertain fancy, he thought he saw a broad, smoothly flowing river. The green meadow beside it, the adjacent woods, where huge trees seemed ineffectually striving to form bridges, were familiar to him. The house in which he was born he saw for an instant before its place was occupied by other objects. A cool breeze came from the water, bringing to him vigor and placidity. He had a strange sensation, yet it was one of peace. He was that river. In his way were no greater trials than the fallen trees which he swept around without inconvenience from their presence or animosity for their interference.

His being was now divided, but the division was unequal. A certain amount of perception alone, stripped of the power of action, separated from the river. Through this perception the dreamer continued his fancies. He could no longer see the river, which retained his capacity for good or evil, his moral responsibility. Gradually the stream narrowed and became more turbulent. This was indicated by the roar of its waters, which, continually rising in pitch, betokened the decline of power and the increase of violence. The cataract, for such it had grown to be, was now as small as that which falls over a schoolboy's dam. Still it decreased in size until it was no larger than an ordinary hand, and soon its water could have been drained as fast as it fell by a thirsty man.

Montcalm started as the stream underwent its last diminution. Once before he had heard that measured trickling. Some time elapsed ere he could turn his head and view the remains of that river, which had parted with strength, beauty and serenity. At last he saw the dropping liquid, but it was not water. It was falling from the end of a plank into a well with a barrel curb. On the plank was the source of the stream, the form of a man with skull cloven and with brain exposed. The frightful wound, which was presented toward Montcalm, showed him that the victim was still cognizant of current events, for shadows of thought were passing along the convolutions of the cerebrum. The shadows, or waves, had no regularity of form or of appearance. At times they moved slowly, at others they passed with great rapidity, like the spokes of a swiftly revolving wheel. The eyes were fixed and lurid, but they were frequently darkened by clouds of meaning, the shades which were sweeping along the brain. The face, undergoing the not unusual exaggeration of dreams, alternately lengthened and broadened, one dimension reaching its maximum development as the other attained its minimum. The sleeper believed its hue was ghastlier than that of death. He reached the climax of his fright when the dead man, by a convulsive effort, changed his features to the aspect of life and fastened on him a look such as he might have given a poor neighbor on whose meager possessions he had a mortgage which he meant relentlessly to foreclose. He knew that Green never gave that wink and leer except when some cherished project of vengeance or finance was materializing to a certainty.

The repulsive object on the plank was once more hideously distorted. As the chin dropped in an abnormal distension, the mouth opened and seemed about to close on Montcalm, who, inert and helpless, dreaded the first touch of the jagged lips. From the cavernous throat deformed beings beckoned to him to join them. What heightened his fear was a mad impulse to precipitate himself into the yawning chasm, an act which he knew would be followed by the most appalling consequences. Strenuously he tried to escape. Not a muscle would contract to help him in his emergency. Finally his will-power prevailed and he was able to flee. Leaving the cellar, he entered the apartment on the ground floor. Instantly from the vicinity of the well came the clamor of pursuit, and after him sprang a dozen men. He was in a very large house which he was determined to quit, but every door which he opened disclosed to him a division of the infinitely vast building. He raced from room to room, from each of which, sustaining a sharp conflict, he emerged, invariably frightened and invariably unhurt. His desperate defense was not prompted by courage, for he had but one desire, that of finding safety at whatever cost. His adversaries, on the contrary, though often driven back and stricken down, returned each time to the attack, not in the least dismayed by the blows which they had received. Presently they forced him to a corner from which he could not retreat. His guard was beaten down, and he was at the mercy of his pitiless enemies. They surrounded him, raising high their bludgeons, which poised an instant before descending.

With a gigantic leap he crashed through the wall and trod the solid earth. Given on this footing an unnatural speed, he swept over fields, fences and woods, barely treading the ground and propelling himself far at every light touch of his foot. No longer were his pursuers in sight or hearing, but fearful of their approach, he would not abate his exertions.

Before him was the great swamp, and his route was the causeway east of Ratke's. He was almost flying along the road, by the side of which the tamaracks grew large and tall, when to his inexpressible horror Archer arose from the bushes, pointed a revolver at him and fired. The shot at once robbed him of his great speed, and in his face blew a strong wind against which he could make little headway. His pursuers again drew near. With savage gesticulations and yells of triumph they pressed about him. In the intensity of despair he felt that he could neither flee nor fight. Helplessly he looked aloft and prayed for relief. As with limbs paralyzed, but with senses painfully acute, he lay momentarily expecting destruction, an angelic form flitted to his rescue, and interposing its bright wings, parried the threatening clubs.

The mien of the angel was benign and serene. Merciful in his strength, he did not injure those who were endeavoring to kill the wretch who had secured his intervention. Montcalm, confident in the will and ability of this being to protect him, imploringly clutched the hem of his garment. The angel stooped and lifted him; and together, propelled by those bright wings, hand in hand, they sped away at a rate which defied pursuit. Their course was midway between the horizontal and the vertical. Terrestrial objects, trees, rivers, hills and plains, blended indistinguishably together on the surface of the disappearing planet, which, a non-luminous ball, was drawing its dusky outlines into smaller compass.

Measureless was the space through which they flew. Montcalm became aware that his feet now and then met a substance which, though not solid, was more tangible than air. His footing grew firmer. He was entering a land where the common objects of inhabited earth were wanting, where irregularly formed bodies cast shadows along the uneven surface. A dull red glare, hovering over a strip of the horizon, gave a quantity of light insufficient to make vision plain. He drew closer to his protector, for he was intimidated by the unfamiliar sight. Journeying on, they came to a locality which was entirely occupied by somber rocks piled in mountain-like masses by convulsions of the sub-strata. In the distance a lurid flame shot up high in the heavens, as if the forces which had wrought that devastation, instead of dying out, had shifted in position and increased in intensity. Awe-stricken, Montcalm paused. Gladly would he have returned to the world from which he had fled; but, as he attempted to escape from his companion, his hand was tightly held, and he was unable to withdraw it. At the same moment the strange being underwent a transformation. His golden wings lost their brilliancy, from the top of his head sprang great horns, his face changed from benignity to diabolical ugliness and was dark and stern as the fire-blackened rocks around him. Agonized beyond measure, Montcalm gazed on him who destroys men's souls, and he remembered that he had voluntarily placed himself in his power. While he was shrinking from his repulsive master and fearfully awaiting the awful flame which had now neared him, he heard, repeated, a long shrill blast, the annunciation that "there should be time no longer."

He opened his eyes as the notes of one of the major's chanticleers was dying away. It was some minutes before he comprehended the unreality of his dream, and even after it was apparent to him, he frequently wondered if it were really a delusion. Day had not yet arrived. The light which came through the evergreens in front of his window was furnished chiefly by the moon, which had more than an hour ere its supersedure by the sun.

The plaster on the walls had cracked, leaving many seams which an unemployed imagination might construe to represent definite shapes. Montcalm's gaze followed one of these lines as, making a number of curves, it formed a grotesque resemblance to a man's head. Uneasily he turned toward the opposite wall, fancying that the picture was shaped like the exaggerated countenance of Green as it had appeared in his dream.

No sooner had he sought relief by changing his posture than his eyes fell on another set of seams which united in the shape of a broad-ax. He sprang from bed resolved that he would not longer stay where the most commonplace things united to make his sojourn hideous.

Weakened by the horrors of the night, he walked slowly from the house. The cattle were lying down in the barnyard. With the exception of himself and Mrs. Grippin's ducks neither animals nor men were astir about the place. Wearily he opened a barn door and climbing a stationary ladder, flung himself on the haymow. Sleep was for him impossible, but he might be able to rest. He did, indeed, find a partial refuge from his harrowing thoughts. But, as the day dawned, he was beset by a swarm of flies, which would give him no peace. When he had covered his face with his hat, they lighted on his hands, and when he had plunged his hands into the hay, they crowded under the hat and still tormented him. He believed that henceforth for him there was no quiet; that all nature had conspired to make him miserable.

He heard the men chatting in the stable and about the barnyard. Not wishing to be discovered in the loft, he climbed down and was passing out, when he met Archer, whose inexpressive face reminded him of the shot which had stopped his flight in the swamp.

Breakfast was to him a severe trial. By dint of great exertion he managed to invent a few gay remarks and to deliver them in a sprightly manner; but the effort was so severe that it could not be prolonged, and he relapsed again into silence.

It was a fine Sabbath morning, and after his few chores were done, he sauntered back of the house, where he was joined by Ratke.

"The murder. has drawn my attention from my own affairs," said the major. "I am again financially embarrassed. Did I tell you about it, Trace?"

"No, you did not," answered Montcalm.

"I do not want to profane the Sabbath, but this is not a business matter," said Ratke, feeling in spite of his explanation that he was doing what he pretended to avoid, "that is, it is not a transaction in business to-day. Durgenson has written me that he must have $4,000 the 23d of this month. I have nothing for him unless I sell the Barton hundred and sixty. What would you do?"

"Do not pay him one cent," replied Montcalm, with an energy which he had not exhibited for days. "He wants to get your entire property. Let him have this farm, but keep——"

"What!" exclaimed the major, "let the place go without an attempt to save it? Do you know how I have become attached to my home? To save it, I will sacrifice, if need be, all my possessions."

"That is what you will do," rejoined Montcalm, "and it will avail you nothing, If you do not pay your indebtedness on the day it is due, the farm belongs to Durgenson. Pay all you owe him, if you pay anything. He does not want it paid. He is longing to get every dollar you have. He would be disappointed to hear that you were prepared to discharge the debt. The shark in whose clutches you have fallen will show you no mercy until the shark of the sea returns a man unharmed to the deck of the vessel from which he has fallen."

"You have a new opinion of Durgenson," said the major. "You were the first one to advise me to take the step which I did."

"God forgive me, I did!" exclaimed Montcalm bitterly. "But all is not ruined now. You have a hundred and sixty acres of good land. That will keep you well, and you need not do a stroke of work. Suppose you let that go and are penniless, what will you do? You ought not to be obliged to labor at your age. I would keep it by all means."

Montcalm purposely strolled near a group of the hired men, and Ratke, unable to impart confidences, returned to the house. Had the gloomy young man been questioned by one who had authority to demand an answer, he could not have explained why he went down the road toward the church and plunged into the wood at the left.

It was with dread that he approached the pond. Its edge had retreated farther from its usual border than it was on the night when he had last visited it. Some turtles which were on a log fell with splashes into the water. A snake swam a rod or two from shore and dived for safety. Montcalm's hair arose as he saw a leech on the muddy bottom worming its way to shore. Sick with aversion, he turned away, believing that the pond and its vicinity was fit only for the habitation of devils. He put his hand inside the hollow tree and drew out the articles which he had there hidden. They were as he had left them, the plunder, the auger, the mask and the rough clothes with their blood-stains. He was not actuated by a love of his ill-acquired money, and he had little curiosity. Indeed, he did not open the pocket-book, and he barely glanced at the clothes.

Restoring to the tree what he had removed, he walked toward the swamp. In the gradual descent he found a spring, and stooping, he took a cool draught and from it bathed his face and head. After being thus invigorated, he resumed his walk in better spirits. From the side of the declivity bubbled other springs, the water of which met in a rivulet, which joined the creek in the tamaracks.

Montcalm sat down near a fallen tree-top which partly obstructed the brook. The limbs reached nearly across the channel; so that the water, sweeping by at one side, made its escape through a narrow passage. The current below was rapid. Above it moved slowly, halting at the tree-top where a partial dam of leaves, sticks and scum was collected. Long strings of green slime swayed to and fro, attached to the bottom and the sides of the channel. Whirled above by the eddies, small objects were passed into a peaceful bay formed by the tree-top and the bank or swept into the turbulent rapids beyond. Montcalm became impressed with the idea that the placid bay held safety and that in the rapid current beyond was destruction. Every piece of bark which was brought by the rivulet he watched to ascertain its fate. He was glad when one reached the smooth haven, disappointed when another swept around the obstruction and was hurried to its doom. By degrees he came to regard each floating substance as a representation of himself, his deeds, his chance of preservation.

An ant crawled down an overhanging bush which almost touched the surface of the brook. Ordinarily it would have maintained its balance, but as it whirled to ascend, struck by a puff of wind, it fell. Montcalm viewed its struggles with interest, for it reminded him of the manner in which he, tossed hither and thither, had been borne down the stream of fatality. He reflected that he could no more have resisted the temptations and circumstances by which he was surrounded than the poor insect could rise above the whirlpools and fly to land. And yet, the ant was in a measure responsible for its misfortune. It had realized the danger and hovered over it, believing that its vigilance was sufficient protection. He had known where flowed the river into which he had leaped, but he had thought that he could leave it before arriving at the fatal rapids, from which there could be no extrication. Not far from him was the cataract which descended to the abyss of eternal woe, its sheet of falling water, its projecting rocks, its appalling roar. If the ant passed into the still haven, he would believe that he might likewise escape. If, swept on by the angry waves, it perished, he would have no prospect of avoiding a similar fate. Anxiously he awaited the result on which in a spirit of fatalism he had based his hopes.

The ant, struggling, floated toward the rapids. The movement, however, was not decisive, and it swam nearer to the shelter of the right bank, where it lay hesitating between the shore and the stream. It again circled, and entering the current, was carried toward the point of a limb which separated the still and the agitated waters. Poised an instant in mock deliberation, it was hurled into the rushing waves. Montcalm was seized with a resolve to rescue the creature. He ran to a stick, which he clutched. When he turned to the brook, the ant had disappeared. He bent over the spot where he had last seen it, he rushed down the stream, he splashed the water with the stick. Not a trace could he find of the insect whose fate he had identified with his own.

"Why, what are you trying to do?" said a voice, at the sound of which he started in alarm, "dragging the river for a dead body?"

The speaker was Durgenson, who was spending Sunday with Sparks and who had approached, unobserved, during Montcalm's preoccupation. He wore a wide-brimmed straw hat and a suit of plaid clothes, with a sack coat which fitted tightly his full muscular figure. "You don't look well," he continued, without waiting for a reply to his question. "Ratke isn't in the habit of working his hands hard enough to hurt them."

"No," said Montcalm, "I am not overworked. I have been awake a great deal nights. I think I will leave the locality soon. I want sleep and a change of scene."

"That is what you ought to have," remarked Durgenson. "You have worked harder than people have any idea of. Now, I'll bet something handsome you can tell who hit old Green."

"Are you any better than I, you swindler?" retorted Montcalm. "You have tricked honest men of small means, from whom I would have been ashamed to take a dollar. I once owned a conscience, but you never had one."

"Oh, there's no use getting in a pet, Trace," responded Durgenson good-naturedly. "I didn't mean anything.

I've come to bring you some money. That ought to put you in better humor. Suppose we settle to-day."

"I have long been wanting a settlement," replied Montcalm. "How much did the last horses bring?"

"The last I sold were the ones they had such a hunt for," said Durgenson. "They brought four hundred dollars."

"Four hundred dollars!" ejaculated Montcalm in surprise. "Madge T. alone ought to have sold for more than that!"

"I can't help that," returned Durgenson. "You can't take advantage of the market where you are dealing in such property. You have to dispose of it the best way you can. Here is two hundred dollars. That makes us square, don't it?"

"No," responded Montcalm, "you owe me a great deal more. I have done the planning for your enterprises and you have reaped the benefits. When I told you of the oat scheme, you agreed to pay me well for the time I spent. I worked at it until I had it perfected. You made thousands of dollars from it. Where is my share? I laid the plan of the Guerrero Mining Company and studied weeks to perfect it. Excepting the one share which I sold, what has it availed me?"

"Well, now, that hasn't panned out much yet," said Durgenson. "I expect it will pay."

"There is one matter I would like to speak about," said Montcalm. "I have made but few requests to you, and you ought to be willing to grant this one. You have Major Ratke's farm in your possession. You are now trying to get the proceeds from the Barton hundred and sixty. Take the old farm if you will, but let him have that fragment of his estate. I ask it as a personal favor, Durgenson."

"Now, that is asking a great deal," remarked Durgenson. "You want me to let him go after he is once in my hand. You helped to catch him yourself."

"So I did," replied Montcalm, "and I have a right to insist that part of my wishes concerning him shall be carried out. I have hated myself ever since I entrapped him."

"I'll see about it," said Durgenson. "Say how much you want a day for your work."

"Fifteen dollars," answered Montcalm, "and I put in, call it ten days."

"All right," said Durgenson. "That is satisfactory. I'll make it two hundred, and then you'll be satisfied. The oat business, though, was profitable. It was well got up, too. The name was worth a fortune. If it had been Chinese or Russian, the farmers might not have bit, but Nijni Novgorod, they couldn't stand that. I suppose you've no objection to getting a thousand more?"

"What do you want done?" inquired Montcalm.

"You see," answered Durgenson, "there's a fellow I don't like the looks of, not that he's homelier than other folks, but he don't look good to me. Now, I want that fellow got out of my sight, out of everybody's sight."

"What do you take me for, you scoundrel?" exclaimed Montcalm, "a cutthroat? I am bad enough, but I will not kill a man for hire."

"Why, you are getting conscientious," sneered Durgenson. "You never used to have any such compunctions. There's a man in the graveyard that would have been walking around if it hadn't been for you. When did you get virtuous?"

"Are you the one to twit me of vice?" angrily cried Montcalm. "You have encouraged me in it and fattened on my misdeeds. When I first knew you, I was an innocent boy, determined to make an honest man. I had no more thought of becoming what I am than you have of giving your property to a benevolent institution.

"My father died, my mother was in poor circumstances, and I was obliged to work in order that I might finish my college course. You hired me at first to bring cattle to the east. You made great professions of honesty and of concern for the welfare of others. In this way you won my confidence. Then you convinced me it was right to run a saloon, that if we did not some one else would and the liquor would still be drunk. From selling whisky, you lured me to swindling. You told me that every man must look out for himself, that honesty is the cant of hypocrites or the practice of fools, that the only wisdom is in looking to self-gain regardless of right or wrong. When you had schooled me well in swindling, you drilled me in horse-stealing, awarding me the danger and you the profit. I tell you, Durgenson, I am going straight to hell and it is you who have sent me. I said I was going to hell. I have been there. I am there now, and I can hardly restrain myself from pulling you in after me."

Durgenson started back, appalled by the terrific aspect of Montcalm, whose hand was raised aloft, whose face was deadly pale, and whose eyes were blazing almost with the fire of lunacy.

"Hold on!" expostulated the cattle-buyer. "Don't talk so loud! Somebody will hear you."

"What do I care if they do?" returned Montcalm, raising his voice still higher. "You have ruined me and are laughing at me for it. Why should I not ruin you? If killing myself would atone for half the evil I have done, I would blow out my brains! If shooting you would restore that old man his farm, you would not live an instant!"

"For God's sake, Trace," Durgenson said, "don't act so! You are crazy. What do you mean by saying you have been to hell?"

"Do you intimate that I lie?" asked Montcalm fiercely.

"No, no," said Durgenson, his astonishment and alarm increasing. "Of course you know where you've been."

"Yes," said Montcalm, with perfect composure, "I was in hell all night. I shall soon go back to stay forever. I am a devil and I know well the final home of devils. You had better leave me. There is no telling what violence you may tempt me to do."

"That is about what I was thinking," replied Durgenson, jumping across the brook. "You don't know who I can get to do the job I spoke of, do you?"

"The fellow who keeps so many dogs," said Montcalm.

Durgenson walked in the direction of Sparks', wondering at the sudden change in his hitherto devoted helper. Montcalm, exhausted in his weakened state by the violence of his passion, sat down at the foot of a tree. When he had been seated a few minutes, he separated a letter from a bundle of papers in his pocket. It was written in a quaint, round hand, which would have been taken at once for that of an old lady.

CORTLAND, N. Y., June 30th, 187—.

MY SON TRACEWORTH:

It has been a long time since I have heard from you. The last letter you sent was when you gave me that fifty dollars. Now that I am alone, I don't know what I should do if God hadn't given me a good boy. You must have changed some since I saw you. That was five years ago. You used to write once a week regularly. Now you don't let me hear from you oftener than once a month. It seems so different now from what it did when we were rich. But it was all for the best. I have provisions enough. All I need now is to hear from my boy. I pray for you every day, Traceworth, two or three times a day. You know there was a spell when you didn't keep good company. Remember what I have told you and keep away from bad men.

MOTHER.

Montcalm put the letter with the papers into his pocket. Gloomily he left the woods to mingle in society which he hated, to listen to words the import of which he did not comprehend, to profess gayety while body and mind were being eaten away by the canker of remorse.

was death on the Injuns. He'd make game of all of 'em he got in sight of. He'd shoot off his rifle, an' then he'd take a revolver in each hand. There wa'n't nothin' he couldn't do. One time they got 'im, but he let 'em. They'd been a-wantin' to git a steamboat on the river; so Zeke he run her to shore and pertended to be a-snoozin'. The Injuns, they come an' catched 'im and tied 'im, but they couldn't run the boat; so they had to let Zeke loose. Zeke, he told 'em to keep stuffin' in the wood an' a-stuffin' it in. Byme by he thought 'twas time to skip, an' so he dropped in the water. Then the biler busted an' blowed 'em all up, all but Zeke. Oh, that Zeke, he was a tearer! He'd killed more'n forty while this 'ere Iverhoe was a-gittin' his spear ready."

Unable to pursue his reading in quiet, John descended to the ground floor. The outside door opened and in walked Panicky.

"Here you are again," said Daggett. "You're just the man I want to see."

"I like to come where I'm wanted," replied Panicky, taking from his shoulder the strap to which his satchels were slung. "There's once in a while a place where they don't appreciate me. But that's what a benefactor of his race must expect. They're persecuted and cursed by the ones they help the most. I'm nothing but a martyr. I'm out in all kinds of weather to give people the benefit of my medicine. It's my mission. You see the hump on my shoulders. I made that carrying my satchels, trying to benefit humanity. When I'm dead and gone, folks will know what they've lost."

"We're partial to the martyrs," said Daggett. "It ain't often we see a real one. Sometimes they come snides on us, fix 'em up bogus, like Barnum's mermaid. You come just when you're needed, Panicky. We're all sick, and we want some martyr to tone us up. Wingscheut here wants a bottle of your panicky on his leg."

"No," objected Wingscheut, "it's a crowin'-out."

"What are you using on it?" inquired Panicky.

"Vell," answered Wingscheut, "tat's for you to fint out if you can. I'll tell you for fife tollars, unt you can sell it to chust as many folks as you vant to."

"Got a touch of summer complaint, have you?" asked Panicky, addressing Sheppard.

"Got nothin'," returned Jake. "I'm tough as a biled owl."

"Bad spell for general debility," said Panicky to Montcalm. "I see it's hit you bad."

"I am quite well," replied Montcalm. "If you think you can beat me pitching hay we will try it when the sun comes out."

"John," said Daggett, "get your fiddle and play us a tune. I want to shake my feet."

John brought down a recently purchased violin and played a lively air, to which Daggett beat an accompanying tattoo with his feet.

"Now, I'll tell you what we'll do, Panicky," said Daggett, "and that's the best offer we'll make, that is, I'll go in for it if the rest of the boys will. If you'll step in there and dance a jig, we'll buy a partnership bottle of your panicky. What do you say, boys?"

Panicky objected, but Daggett assured him that he could sell his medicine to them in no other way. Accordingly the two stepped into the middle of the room and began to dance a quickstep while John played. The music was quickened. Daggett was the first who failed to keep pace with the rapid notes. Panicky's superiority over his rival was now unquestioned. His body was nearly stationary, but his feet and legs twisted and turned like those of a jumping-jack; and from underneath them came a clatter which was almost like the rattle of a snare drum. He would not have lagged behind the music had its rate not been still further increased by John. As it was, he missed a few steps, recommenced further on, and at last, becoming hopelessly entangled, passed to the outside of the circle.

"He's the best player I ever heard but one, and he was a foreigner," said Panicky, after John had gone. "Do you know where he come from?"

"He won't tell any one that," replied Daggett. "It's queer, too. I never heard him speak of his folks or where he's been before he come here."

That night John did his chores early. He was in the parlor before dark, for there was a matter which he wished to talk over with Manie. How strong were his hopes, what an unwonted confidence he had in the future as he entered the room and she greeted him with a smile. Despite her kind welcome he dreaded to broach the subject for which he had come. That which he had deemed assured now appeared very doubtful, and his voice grew so unsteady that he dared not ask his intended question. Just as his timidity was getting under subjection, Ratke opened the door and taking a seat beside him, began to discuss moral theories, for which, in the absence of Montcalm, he was anxious to find a listener. To the major and his niece John threw his glances, hesitating between a desire to please and to get rid of the troublesome philosopher. Ratke, exhausting the first subject, commenced another.

To one of the philosopher's questions which he had imperfectly understood, John ventured an affirmative answer.

"The same, then, you say," replied Ratke. "It is called the identical wave, but I cannot understand its right to claim identity, when it bears to it hardly a resemblance. It has undergone each of the two changes to which matter is subject. It is increased in size, and altered in composition. A political movement begins. Its authors die and are succeeded by leaders whose creeds and practices are antagonistic to theirs. The founders advocated thrift, economy, simplicity and progress; the followers advocate useless offices, vast expenditures, pomp and an adherence to methods the only recommendation of which is that they were necessary in an emergency. Patriotism and virtue have turned to self-interest and corruption. Why should we call this miserable relic the old party, when it has preserved its being neither in men nor in principles, only in name? Answer me that, John."

"I see," said Ratke, "my words, sent to your brain without making an impression, form a case of total reflection. In the physical world this is possible only from a highly burnished surface, but it is not so in the mental. The liability to total reflection increases as the square root of the intellectual vigor decreases. No offense is intended, John. Your age and the circumstances in which you are placed make the rule not applicable to you. No doubt you have heard enough about the wave and you want now to see its posterior as it recedes."

With this good-natured conclusion the major rose and, taking a book from the library, went to the dining-room, where he was obliged to hear a harangue by Mrs. Grippin on the scarcity of wood.

John had fancied that when his employer left, he would have no difficulty in stating the nature of his errand ; but when he was alone with Miss Ratke, his old timidity returned. He would have been able to perform his mission at once had it not been for another request in reserve, which he wished her not to suspect.

On this account he broached topics which were foreign to the theme uppermost in his thoughts. Finally he delivered this unscientific preliminary, "I am going to the concert at Oakville to-morrow night."

"I hope you will have a good time," said his companion. "It is a local affair, I believe. Still, it will be quite interesting. They have some good singers there."

"I would like to have you go," said John, trying to assume a careless manner. "Will you be at home to-morrow night?"

"Certainly not all the time if I go with you," responded Miss Ratke, "and I believe I shall accept your invitation."

"Thank you," answered John. "I will call at about six."

"Very well," said Manie, "I promised Jennie Holmes to come to her house to-night and I must be going."

John had performed his errand, yet he lingered at the door feeling that he had something still to tell. At last he said, "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Manie in surprise, "for how long? Not quite a day."

"I hope not more than that," replied John. "But I have found that my expectations are not to be depended upon. That prospect on which I calculate most is apt to be most completely dissipated."

He tried to keep warmth from his words and tones that they might not betray his longing to indulge in passionate utterance, utterance which, he thought, would warn Manie of the depth of his feeling and banish him from her beyond the possibility of a return. His whole being fought against the restraint. He threw back at her another look and saw a glance which appeared to contain encouragement, but which he could not analyze with certainty. An apprehension seized him that a golden opportunity was passing away, but its place was taken by another that speech would destroy a growing prospect. Their separation promised to be short; and yet, as if he were about to start on a long journey, he felt a desire to bid her a second and different farewell.

Checking himself with the fear that he had already said too much, he left her presence. The next night he would stake his hopes on a revelation to Manie, which, if all circumstances were considered, did not promise a satisfactory result. He was not confident. He shut his eyes to the consequences, while a dread of failure was using its influence to dissuade him from his design.

In the backyard he met Montcalm, who thus addressed him:

"There is a little matter I meant to have spoken to you about before. Suppose we take a walk."

"I cannot now," responded John, "I have an engagement."

"Accommodate me as soon as you can, then," said Montcalm.

"Any time to-morrow," replied John, hastening to the club-house.

He stayed a few minutes in the chamber and, bringing down his violin, was about to leave the building when Daggett stopped him.

"What, John, you ain't going away?"

"I must," Wrengell replied.

"Oh, pshaw!" ejaculated Daggett, "that's just the way when we need you. Well, go it. I don't blame you."

After Wrengell's departure, Montcalm entered the club-house and asked concerning his whereabouts.

"He's gone," answered Archer, "took his fiddle and gone."

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. BOYLE'S HOUSE.

FROM Ratke's Wrengell proceeded eastward. As he passed Takum's, he was loudly greeted by the dogs. They were, however, recalled by Philetus, for an infuriated Irishman had lately hurled a club with such force and precision that the larger pup had been permanently lamed and subsequently sold at a sacrifice. In the increasing darkness the great tamaracks, which were near the center of the causeway, could not be separately distinguished, but their masses cast a gloomy shade over the road and were easily discerned even against the clouded sky.

John stopped at Wallace's house, the door of which was opened by Julia.

"Come in," said the maiden. "You live to the major's, don't you? Take off your hat and stay awhile."

"That is where I live," answered John. "Thank you, I cannot stop."

"Oh, now you better come in," insisted Julia. "It's just as cheap to set in the house as it is to poke around outdoors. Pa and Ab are gone away to-night, plague take 'em. I'm all alone and so lonesome I don't know what to do. We could git acquainted in no time."

"Can you tell me the way to Mrs. Boyle's?" asked John.

"Why, it's too dark to git to Mrs. Boyle's," said Julia. "Of course I'll tell you the way, though. You go right up here to the first corner. Then you want to turn to your right. Then you take the first turn to your left. Then you take the first turn to your right. Then you go past two houses and you'll come to a gate. It's a funny gate, and I'll bet a cooky you never see one like it before. It's got a great monstrous beam on the top, and way on the end of that beam there's a box, and the box has got some big stones in it. You'd think it would be all you could do to lift it, but it swings around just like nothin'. Ole McDuff always makes his gates in that way. Well, you go in there and bear to your right till you come to a stake and rider fence. You foller that fence to the woods, and there you'll strike a path. That'll take you to Mrs. Boyle's. But you'll git sick of it. It's awful dark. You better come in and stay with me. We'll have a high ole time."

"It is impossible," replied John. "I promised to go to Mrs. Boyle's. Thank you for your information."

"Say," exclaimed Julia suddenly. "I know the way and you don't. I better go along with you and show you."

"I am much obliged," returned John, "but I can find the way from the description you gave. I do not want you to take any such trouble."

"No trouble at all," replied Julia. "I'll be right out."

"No," said John firmly, "I would rather go alone."

"Go it, devil," cried Julia angrily. "Start your stumps. Don't you never come here again."

A little more than half a mile from Wallace's John came to four corners and turning south, recrossed the swamp, which near this point curved to the eastward. He reached the end of the road, which bent to the left, proceeded a short distance, circled to the right and presently arrived at the gate which had been described by Julia. He found it, as she had said, easy to open. There was comparatively little friction at the hinges, and the ponderous beam was so balanced by the end and box of heavy stones that it did not require lifting. The path went with many variations to the stake and rider fence, where it was straight until it reached the woods. The fence, higher at this place than at others, was securely staked and wired. Evidently it had been knocked down by careless pedestrians and rebuilt by the owner of the land in such a manner as to prevent all depredations except those of a wanton character.

He was rejoiced when he stood at the edge of a clearing, from the farther side of which glimmered a light. His troubles were not yet over. Between him and the house were thickets of blackberry bushes, which caught in his clothes and scratched his face and hands. As he descended the rise of ground at the border of the woods, the light disappeared, and he groped without guidance to gain his destination. When he emerged from the thicket, he found that he had gone some rods out of his way. Congratulating himself that he had escaped with so few inconveniences on so dark a night, he advanced to the house and was admitted by the cattle-buyer, Durgenson.

The cottage into which John stepped was small and humble, but comfortably furnished. In a corner of the principal room, which was at once kitchen and parlor, was a safe with scalloped newspapers placed over the top and hung on the doors. Near the safe was a table on which rested some curious stones and a few books. The walls were covered with paper, and from them were suspended pictures of little art, too long drawn to be called new, and too modern to be ranked as antiquities. That a person of Christian principles had assisted in furnishing the house was indicated by two Bibles, some Sabbath school papers, some religious works, including the life of Whitefield and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and a cardboard motto worked in zephyr which read, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." The only occupant of the cottage besides Durgenson was a dark-complexioned young man who had a short, bristling mustache, a sullen, resolute face, and eyes which were ever eluding the scrutiny of those whom he met. This evasion of the gaze of others resulted not from timidity, but from a desire to keep his thoughts to himself. Indeed, no sagacious observer would have ascribed cowardice to him, for such an imputation would have been contradicted by his every appearance. The lamp on the table was surrounded by millers, which darted against it, but were prevented by the chimney from reaching the flame. The young man busied himself by catching them, thrusting them into the lamp, and watching their death struggles with the keenest interest. When Durgenson introduced him, he shook Wrengell's hand, still averting his eyes, and immediately resumed his occupation of catching millers.

"I was afraid it would be so dark you wouldn't come," said the cattle-buyer. "You must have had a bad time getting through the woods. You kept the business secret, as I told you?"

"As nearly as I could," replied John. "I could never have found the way from the description you gave me. I inquired at a house after I started."

"Is that so?" asked Durgenson. "Where did you inquire?"

"At Wallace's," answered John. "I said nothing about you. I merely asked the way to Mrs. Boyle's. I hope it did no damage."

"Oh, no," said Durgenson. "Of course, when I go into anything, I don't advertise it. But probably no one will mistrust what you came for. I believe I didn't tell you what I wanted of you."

"What business do you wish to hire me to do?" asked John.

"The stock business," answered Durgenson. "I want you to drive and to buy cattle and horses, perhaps sheep."

"But I have had no experience," objected John. "You would certainly lose if you had me use my poor judgment in buying."

"Don't be too sure about that," returned Durgenson. "It's in you, and I know it. I've had my eye on you for quite a while. I can tell whether I want a man or not the first time I see him. I care more about honesty than experience. I had a cowboy to work for me once. He would guess the weight of a steer almost to a pound notch. But I wouldn't board that fellow for all he'd do. He'd get drunk, and then he'd either pay so much that I lost, or offer so little that the stockmen would get mad and wouldn't have anything to do with us. Then I had another hand that was steady and a good buyer, but he was always smousing me. It's hard to find one that's just right, mighty hard."

"I have a course of study which I am very anxious to finish," said John. "I really ought not to give my attention to new subjects now. But if you hire me, it will be necessary. What wages do you propose to give?"

"Oh, as to that," Durgenson returned, "I can't give you as much at first as I give an experienced hand. I wouldn't venture over fifty dollars a month and expenses for the first three months. After that, if I kept you at all, I could bid up to seventy-five or a hundred. I'd want you to commence right off."

"I cannot do that," replied John. "I have hired to Major Ratke for all summer."

"You are sure you told no one about coming here?"

"No one except Miss Wallace," John replied, "and the boys at Ratke's did not know which way I came."

"Why I'm so careful," explained Durgenson, "Pease and I have quite a rivalry. I get the start of him once in a while, and he beats me when he can. Sometimes, after I've got a plan ready, he drops on to it and gets ahead of me. When I begin to hire men, he knows something is up, and he gets wind of it some way. Now, I'm satisfied there's money in a car-load of horses to put in here, and I mean to get them before he does."

Glancing past the cattle-buyer, John saw an ugly shadow on the wall. It was the head of a man with an abnormally large nose and a savage, repulsive countenance, The exaggerated shape was made by the rays of the lamp falling on the face of young Boyle, who had finished his insect butchery and was sitting still and silent by the table. From each of his eyes was reflected a ball of light something like that which shines from the orb of an excited cat. John was momentarily impressed by the figure on the wall and the sullen behavior of the young man, who, he observed, looked at him often, but avoided meeting his direct gaze.

"I want you to begin your training to-night, Wrengell," said Durgenson; "I've got my horse out here tied to a tree, and I want you to guess what he's worth."

"What," asked John, "practice an art before learning the theory? You said that you would give me a book, so that I could get posted."

"So I will," assured the stockman. "But you ought to take every opportunity to improve. If you can't afford to spend the time, I'll give you ten dollars rather than to have you unprepared when I'm ready to use you. You will acquire judgment. You'll guess with him, won't yo Alf?"

"Yes," answered young Boyle.

"He's out there in the woods tied to a tree," explained Durgenson. "The stable door is so narrow I couldn't make him go through it. You must tell me what he is best adapted for, running, trotting or pulling."

A bat flew in at a window and displeased with its new quarters, circled about the room in desperate but unavailing efforts to escape. Young Boyle rushed at it, struck it down with a narrow piece of thin board and picking it up, made sure of its death by crushing it between his fingers.

As he was tossing the lifeless creature through the window, a woman entered the door which had admitted John. She was about fifty years of age, was plainly dressed, and, John thought, had the most benevolent face he had ever seen. She appeared astonished at finding so many occupants in the house, and looked from John to Durgenson as if to ascertain the object or objects of their visit.

"What are you here for?" growled young Boyle, with an oath. "I thought you was goin' to stay to Blake's all night."

"Mrs. Blake is better," responded the woman meekly. "Mrs. Sparks and Mrs. Holmes are both there, and they said I might as well come home. I have been up two nights in succession, and I can rest better here than there."

"I'd have stayed till mornin' an' got my breakfast," said Boyle. "You've earned your board there, I guess."

"This is Mr. Durgenson, I think," remarked the woman, after a long survey of the cattle-buyer.

"That is my name," replied Durgenson, "but I don't remember where we ever got acquainted."

"I am Mrs. Boyle," said the woman. "We met at Chicago after the death of Mr. and Mrs. Lehmann. Perhaps you will remember that Mr. Boyle and I were their nearest neighbors."

"Oh, yes," answered Durgenson, with a show of uneasiness. "It was so long ago I wouldn't have recognized you if you hadn't spoken about our being acquainted."

"And this young man," said Mrs. Boyle, "I have never met him."

"Excuse me," Durgenson apologized, "I'll introduce you."

John wondered that so refined a lady should have so brutal a son. It struck him that he was having a generous share of her attention and that, courteous as she had seemed, she was allowing her curiosity to master her civility.

"That looks like a violin case," said Mrs. Boyle. "Do you play, Mr. Wrengell?"

"I have had some practice on that instrument," replied John.

"I wish you would play for us," said Mrs. Boyle, "I like to hear music."

The lady's interest in John apparently increased as she listened to the strains of the violin. Her eyes brightened; the kindly expression on her face was intensified to a degree which reached regard and love.

"That is beautiful," she said, when John had finished the air. "I have thought that the violin ought to be used in church. There is truth in saying that the Devil ought not to be allowed all the best music. I hope you don't play for dances."

"No, ma'am," he replied. "That is, not for public dances," he added, recollecting his performance in the club-house.

"I am glad to hear that," said the lady. "You could do so much good if you wished. Think how many you could draw to the house of God, some that would not come for anything only to hear good music. There is a great responsibility resting on you, Mr. Wrengell. You must use your talents rightly or they may be taken away."

John felt at this gentle rebuke a sense of shame which would not have been imparted by harsher censure.

"I presume you play on other instruments," continued Mrs. Boyle. "A good organ player can make himself very useful. The organ is used so much for sacred music."

A loud squalling, as of some cats about to engage in desperate battle, arose outside the cottage. On hearing the sound Boyle sprang up and went hurriedly to a bedroom where he rummaged noisily about, but he soon reappeared, bearing a double-barreled shotgun.

"What are you going to shoot, Alfred?" inquired Mrs. Boyle.

"I'm a-goin' to shoot them cats," returned the young fellow, whom we, like Durgenson, will call Alf.

"Oh, don't do that," protested Mrs. Boyle. "It may be Mr. Lowry's Bob. You know how much they think of him."

"Let 'em keep him to home, then," gruffly returned Alf, passing out of the house. "There'll be a howlin' out here all night. I won't lose my rest for no cat."

In a few minutes he returned, disappointed, from his hunt. Resuming his chair by the table, he sat with his forehead so traversed by wrinkles that its primarily narrow surface was much diminished and his eyebrows almost met his hair. After a short occupation of this seat, he arose and again went to the bedroom. When he emerged, he walked straight to the outside door, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

"Are you going away, Alfred?" asked Mrs. Boyle, with an anxiety which she could not suppress.

"It's none o' your bisness where I'm goin'," he replied, turning furiously about, the wrinkles on his brow changed in direction from horizontal to perpendicular, "I'm of age, I thank you."

"Now, Wrengell," said Durgenson when Alf's footsteps were no longer audible to them, "we'd like to hear another tune. At least, I would."

John complied with Durgenson's request and putting his violin in its case, announced his intention to leave.

"Oh, what's the use of being in a hurry?" said the cattle-buyer. "You've got all night to go home in. I'll light you through the woods with a lantern."

"Will you do an errand for me?" asked Mrs. Boyle.

"Certainly," answered John. "What do you wish?"

"Take a letter to Mrs. Grippin if you will. I will see if I can find it."

Mrs. Boyle lighted a lamp, proceeded to the bedroom and closed the door. Presently she came out with two envelopes in her hand.

"I am sorry to keep you waiting," she said, handing John an envelope. "I haven't my glasses on. Perhaps you can tell which one of these is directed to Mrs. Grippin."

When she had finished speaking, Mrs. Boyle stood between John and Durgenson, close to the latter, so that the view between the two men was almost wholly obstructed. The first envelope which John scanned was addressed to Mrs. Cyrus Boyle, Detroit, Mich. The second bore the following inscription: "Do not go back the way you came. Go back of the house and you will find a road that you must follow. Look out for Durgenson and my son. Remember."

John could hardly repress a start of surprise as he read this warning, which made a strong and instantaneous impression. Neither in the appearance of Mrs. Boyle nor in that of Durgenson was there any confirmation of the message. Her countenance was still untroubled, and he was as smiling and good-natured as ever.

"I'll go with you," said Durgenson. "We'll want a lantern. We can't get through without."

"Thank you," returned John, "I shall not need your help."

"Now don't forget my errand," said Mrs. Boyle. "My son is careless once in a while. You must remember."

"If you'll get a lantern, Mrs. Boyle," said Durgenson, "I'll go to the fields with him. He'll never find the way out alone."

"No," said John, in a positive tone, "I do not need any company, nor am I anxious to have a lantern."

"I'd like to speak to you a minute," remarked Durgenson, "just a minute."

"Come to Major Ratke's, then," John returned, as he quickly left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SWAMP.

THE night was lighter than it had been when John arrived at Mrs. Boyle's. The curtain which shrouded the sky was torn in a few places, and through the rents here and there was gleaming a star.

John ran across the cleared space back of the house, meeting but one obstacle, a stump, which threw him and slightly bruised his leg. The interval between the house and the woods, or more properly the brush, was short; and it was not long before he was in the woods to which Mrs. Boyle had alluded. It had formerly been a wagon track, but of late it had been so seldom used by teams that one side of it was grown over with weeds, although the other was beaten down by foot passengers. Its width aided him in keeping it, and, moreover, the near bushes by their sharp briars notified him whenever he encroached on their territory.

He began to feel that his alarm in the house was unnecessary and that he had acted rudely toward Durgenson, who certainly had given him no cause for such treatment. His refusal of guidance through the woods seemed to him every moment more rude and uncalled for. And yet he could account for Mrs. Boyle's warning only by one of two suppositions, that she had some reason for her extraordinary caution or that she was insane. After she had handed him the envelope, she had disarmed the suspicion of the cattle-buyer by calmness and feigned indifference, such as might be used by a sly lunatic who was planning to deceive his keeper. He resolved that at the next opportunity he would amply apologize to Durgenson, though he could not imagine a way in which he might explain his uncivil departure.

The road ended at the edge of a field, beyond which was some large timber, which was faintly visible. The intervening ground had been recently plowed by some unenterprising farmer who was late in the preparation of his summer fallow. Much of it lay up in large masses, which fell in pieces when it was trodden upon, for the dry weather had not baked it as it had the more easily influenced clay. John debated whether he would follow the edge of the improvement or enter the woods, but he soon adopted the latter course.

A short distance from the field was a steep descent leading to the swamp, which here, at the end of a considerable stretch to the east, turned abruptly southward. He was at the bottom of the hill, preparing to return to the higher ground, when he heard in the bushes at his right a crashing, which, had he been in an eastern tropical jungle, he might have imagined to be made by a hippopotamus or an elephant. The crashing, together with its supplement, the sound of heavy and frequent blows from a cudgel, receded farther to the interior of the swamp. The day and the night of unusual circumstances had fortified John against surprises, yet they had not so far stripped him of curiosity as to keep him from wishing to unravel the mystery. Leaving his violin by a tree which he thought he could readily find, he followed the retreating noise, which, though varying in volume, was continuous and was an excellent safeguard against his being discovered by those who made it. It occurred to him that in thus dogging the footsteps of others, when he could assign no good reason for so doing, he was playing an unworthy part; but, as many a comparatively upright man had done before him, he subordinated his strictest sense of honor to the fulfillment of his desire. He soon came near enough to the disturbance to ascertain that two men were conducting a horse through the swamp, one leading him by a halter, the other occasionally belaboring him with a tamarack pole.

"Touch him up," said Wallace, who held the halter-strap and a lantern. "We won't get out of here till morning unless we're careful."

"I'll warm his ole sides," responded Ab. "Git along here with you."

"You want to look out, Ab," warned the father. "You don't know who's prowling around."

"Oh, you're always a worryin', dad," returned Ab. "I'm a-talkin' low. There ain't anybody goin' to poke around here at one o'clock for fun."

"Yes, the first thing we know we'll get gobbled," complained Wallace. "There'll be a pile of profit in that. I've a good notion to say I'll quit this kind of work. You can't make much of a living at it. There, I've got my foot in one of them devilish holes again! I'm wet clear up to my hips. I don't expect anything but what I'll be sick to-morrow with the rheumatism."

"Oh, this'll only just limber you up, dad," consoled Ab. "You ain't dead yet. You can grunt."

"I wish you wouldn't be so cunning," returned Wallace, with a whine. "It don't feel funny to be all crippled up. You know how I was last winter and you hadn't ought to laugh."

"Why don't you laugh, too? That's what 'ud do you good. Come, chirk up, dad. Less hear how 'twould sound for you to talk without that whine."

"If you felt like I do, you wouldn't be so chipper," said Wallace.

They had now reached a lower and thinner growth of bushes, where John could not follow them so closely as he had done without incurring a strong risk of detection. For a time, therefore, their conversation was unintelligible to him. As they entered the tamaracks, he quickened his pace and was presently at no great distance from them.

This was several miles below the retreat which had been fitted by Montcalm, and the use of which had been abandoned on account of the possibility that it had been discovered during the great hunt and that it would be secretly watched.

"I wish we had a market for these horses, dad," said Ab. "We'd make something then."

"I'm a-going to have a bigger share of 'em than I git now," said Wallace, "or I won't work."

"That's what you've said before," replied Ab, "but you keep right on."

"Well, there's no use of it," said Wallace. "I can do such business just as well as Montcalm can. He won't fool me much longer. I'll make him an offer; and then, if he don't come to my terms, we'll go it on our own hook."

"Now you're showin' some spunk," returned Ab. "We can sell horses as well as he can. He's one of the middlemen you tell about. Takes all of the profits and don't labor himself."

"There wouldn't be any trouble about selling 'em," declared Wallace. "When you get the start of me on a horse dicker, you've got to be up in the morning. I ain't a bit afraid but what I could show Trace Montcalm a trick or two."

"Who do you suppose the boss is that he's tellin' so much about?" asked Ab.

"I don't believe there is any," said Wallace. "That's one of his lies. He thought if he said that, he could grind our faces under a kind of a monopoly. I'll let him know what I think about it, too. I ain't dependent on him."

"Less have the whole benefit of this one ourselves," proposed Ab. "We're sharp enough for that. We can sell him and not be caught. We can do anything Montcalm can."

"We'll see," said Wallace. "Hold the horse while I pull up these few trees in front. I wish Whipple knew how to break a colt. This one won't half lead."

Ab had started for the purpose of taking the halter-strap, when the animal, jerking away from the elder Wallace, plunged among the trees, which at this place were not unusually thick, and circling about a large fallen tamarack, went toward the hard land in a course parallel with the road. Ab raced hurriedly back along the cleared strip, turning his head to one side, although his attempts to see the beast which he wished to intercept were necessarily unavailing. So intent was he on securing his lost plunder and so little light came through the tops of the trees, that without warning he came full against John, who was in the act of rising from his crouching position. Quickly gathering himself, he rushed among the tamaracks exclaiming, "Run, dad, run!"

The lantern which Wallace carried was immediately extinguished. The sounds of three bodies, one at the left and two at the right, were heard moving through the swamp. John endeavored to follow one of the objects at the right. He had no hope or intention of capturing the Wallaces, who at such a place and at such an hour would prove inconvenient prisoners to one man unsupported. It was, he thought, advisable for him to secure the colt, restore him to his owner, and testify to what he had seen and heard. Groping carefully and keeping his hands before his face were necessary precautions for protection against the limbs, some of which were dry, pointed, and hard. The horse was moving from him, but its retreat was slower than his advance. It was proceeding toward an opening in the tamaracks, through which could be seen patches of nearly cloudless sky.

This opening was on each side of the creek which ran lengthwise of the swamp. On the bank of the stream the colt stood, undecided as to which direction he should pursue. When John went toward him, he did not run away, but turning, remained with his heels suggestively presented. The man again made a circuit, and again the horse anticipated his design and gave a quiet but significant challenge. John persevered long in his endeavors, but at last, seeing their uselessness, he decided to retrace his way, giving no further notice to the colt. Accordingly, he set out to regain the road which he had quitted; but he had no sooner undertaken this task than he was followed by the colt, which seemed bent on keeping neither afar off nor in close proximity. Near a tall stub which loomed above the smaller trees, he stopped to ascertain his location and the course which it was best for him to follow. He was in a stunted, rather thin growth of the tamaracks. About him were trunks, the diameters of which were out of proportion to their heights, and limbs which reached far outward as if vainly trying to extend themselves over the entire surface of the ground. Farther on were the tops of the smaller trees which were too dense for penetration by the vision of one who was not in their midst. After he had calculated upon his probable distance from the place which he wished to reach, he selected a conspicuous broken tree-top as a land-mark and advanced toward it. From this he was obliged to proceed unaided by a visible goal, for the trees were so nearly of a height and so close together that a distance of a few feet sufficed to make them indistinguishable. He thought the way to the road very long and very tedious. Now and then he halted to make observations, but as they were invariably limited to thirty square rods of swamp and an indefinite expanse of sky, they were productive of no good. It was with a feeling of relief that he saw the perceptible stretch of the now well-lighted heavens move downward and expand as the tamaracks diminished in stature. But his joy was dissipated when he found that he had traversed a circle and returned to the broken tree which he had left a few minutes before. Once more he set out, and once more, making the circuit, came back to the familiar stub. He now concluded that by another direction he would try to reach the upland. His next attempt was to return to the creek, and this he accomplished. It was now morning. He wandered up and down the creek, but he was unable to find a ford. In desperation he retreated a few paces from the stream and running up to the edge, jumped with all his might.

The creek was so wide that a trained athlete might not easily have cleared it at a leap; and he landed, therefore, in the muddy bottom, where he sank above his waist. Luckily for him, he struck within reach of some bushes, which afforded so good a hold that by hard pulling he was able to extricate himself. Striking out from this point, he met with the same success which had attended his efforts on the opposite side.

But by following the creek, he reasoned, in the course of a mile or two he would arrive at a public highway. With this end in view he proceeded down the left bank. A walk of thirty rods brought him to a bridge which was curiously constructed of poles. Across it teams and wagons had been driven, and from the right bank branched two roads. Passing over the creek, he took the left track, which turned and led him back to the bridge. He recrossed it, satisfied that he was in a fair way to reach the improvements. The colt, which had awaited him on the right bank, and had followed him along the circuitous road approached the edge, snorted, stepped on the poles carefully at first, and then finished the risky passage with a sudden rush. The road wound among the trees, its undulations indicating the way which had been most easy to clear. It brought John to some scattered bushes bordering a sandy slope where blossomed buckwheat was growing. He gained the eminence and beheld the welcome signs of civilization—houses, farms, orchards and cultivated fields. The sun was well up, and the hour for beginning farm labor had arrived. Between him and the nearest house young cattle and milch cows were grazing. Near the road and far to the right a boy was riding a wheel cultivator. The creak of a plow wheel came from the opposite side of an untrimmed hedge at the left. The hedge gave place to a board fence about midway in the line of division which separated the two fields. As John climbed the fence, the plow approached, drawn by two bay horses, one of which was wind-broken. The plowman had a sunburned, rather disagreeable countenance. He wore an old felt hat which was tucked under at the sides, so that it stuck out in peaks before and behind.

"Good-morning," said John.

"Good-morning, sir," responded the plowman.

"Can you tell me where I am?" asked John.

"I guess I can," answered the plowman. "Looks to me as if you was in my field."

"I got lost in the swamp," said John, "and I have no idea where I am. Am I still in Jefferson Township?"

"No," replied the man, "you ain't in that county. You're in Washtenaw, now, township of Warren."

"I wish to go to Break o' Day," said John. "Will you please direct me so that I can find the way?"

"Go to the road and make north. By and by you'll come to the forks. One comes here and one goes to Sharptown. You want to take the handle and that leads to Break o' Day. Helloa, is that your horse?"

The exclamation was caused by the colt, which had trotted to the fence and was whinnying to the team.

"No," answered John, "he followed me from the swamp."

"Followed you from the swamp!" echoed the plowman. "That's funny that he should be in there."

"Yes," said John, thinking it best to impart his newly gained information first to the authorities and afterward to the owner of the horse, "I found him there, and he seemed as anxious to get out as I."

"Did you catch him?"

"No, I did not."

"I'm going to try it now," said the man, climbing the fence. "Oh, you bloody brute!" he ejaculated, quickly retreating, as the colt whirled and stood with his heels toward him.

"Can I get something to eat at your house?" inquired John.

"Well, now, I don't know. It's just as the woman says about that. You can go up and ask her."

In twenty minutes John was leaving the house with his hunger appeased. It was with self-congratulations on his escape from the swamp, that, avoiding the graveled walk which lay between circular beds of flowers, he passed through the large gate and took long, steady strides toward Break o' Day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BREAK O' DAY.

Break o' Day is one of the oldest villages in Jackson County. It had its store and its school-house before the first building was erected in Sharptown or Oakville. The derivation of its name has been the subject of many inquiries, which have been answered by local antiquarians. The founders of the hamlet, like the majority of Michigan pioneers, came from New York. Four families built their houses near together, that they might enjoy the society of neighbors. Others followed from the Empire State, and the neighborhood became thinly settled. They had dwelt on the eastern hills, where, unobstructed, a view extended for miles. They were now in the midst of woods, where they could view no distant object unless it were above the timber. Month after month they lived in this manner, and daily the complaints grew louder. The women, who had been accustomed to habits of thrift, longed to see the sun rise once more. They declared it was nothing but laziness which allowed them to be penned up in that fashion, that if they were men, they would chop out at least one place wide enough to give them a sight through the forest. Urged on by their wives, the men made a bee and hewed to the eastward a road through which the earliest beams of the daily luminary might shine. The next morning the entire population of the locality gathered to witness the blaze of light which slowly appeared above the long stretch of stumps. Shouts resounded, guns were fired, a feast was spread, and the place was promptly named Break o' Day.

The village never grew to the dimensions which were anticipated for it by its first builders. Twenty years ago its appearance was substantially as it is to-day. It was built on five corners, from which ran roads, one to each

oubt ‘like mists that rise before the sun.’ Like the fogs that roll upward from our noble swamp, or mosquitoes that fly before—when there’s a smudge. We helped Oakville with her fair, and that was all right. This year we wanted a celebration, and she said, ‘We won’t have any.’ We got up one, and what did Oakville do? She turned right square around and got up one too, and we couldn’t get any crowd. What did she do it for? For the money. For the trade. Think of it, speculating on the Fourth of July. On what day? Remember, no common day, but on that glorious, that immortal, that never-to-be-forgotten day, when American liberty reached its culmination, its pinnacle, its apex, its—high as it could get. What do you think of that recreant, that rascal who can on that day even think of, or reach out his hand to clutch ten cents, or one dollar, or ten dollars. And yet, I grieve to say that in this land, consecrated to the rights of humanity, such men exist. They are in Oakville. They live, they breathe, they taint the pure air of freedom.”

The drizzling rain of the preceding day had forced a
mporary suspension of haying, so that the store began
be populated by loungers from the near farms as well
om the village.

octor,” said a man, who carried a large black bottle,
ife is sick and I’d like to get some medicine.”
well,” replied the doctor. “These men forget
fathers were. They are not like the citizens of
y. Break o’ Day remembers. Do you see
nder? That is Warren, and Warren sleeps
l.”

” urged the man with the bottle, “my
d she’s got to have some spirits.”
o,” Rorus responded. “Do you see
is on Jackson Street. Break o’ Day
ry. Oh, he was the man for you!
mmovable, rigid, had a backbone.
ington Street. Break o’ Day re-
is Country. Oh, that George
in all history, very greatest.
he Indians shot at him. The
d February (yes, and that’s

the coldest of the whole), they nipped at his feet. But did they hurt him? No, sir."

"Doctor," protested the waiting customer, "my wife is awful sick."

"I'll wait on you in just a minute," said the physician.

"Who would make a good correspondent for this place?" inquired the Oakville agent, wishing to gain information before Rorus recommenced his harangue.

"Well," answered the doctor, "there's Ned Sturgis over in the post-office. He's a mighty smart fellow. Posted right up to the handle. You couldn't do any better than to get him. Then, there's my clerk, Fred Loomis, he's a bright one. Smart as steel. You never noticed him, did you? He'd pick up everything there was going. Quick-witted, you know. Catches on to anything before other folks have a glimpse of it. I wouldn't wonder if he's the best one you'll run across. Ned Sturgis is good. I sha'n't say which is the best. My clerk, though, he is A number one. You don't know what the boy is till you are acquainted with him. Now, I sha'n't say which is the best. But, of the two, of the two, my clerk's a le-etle—le-etle—I sha'n't draw any distinction."

"Doctor," said the impatient man, "if you can't wait on me, I'm going over to Sullivan's. I know I can get it there.'

"Yes, immediately," replied the doctor. "You are sure your wife is sick?"

"I should think so. She like to have died this morning."

"I have to be particular," said Rorus; "I can't sell only for medicinal purposes."

"Sullivan ain't so particular," said the customer. "I can go there any time an' get all the whisky I want."

"That is a disgrace to Break o' Day," commented the doctor. "That reproach to society, that den of iniquity, that abominable hole, should be closed up. To whom are they selling? To the merchant, to the farmer, to the clerk, to the business man, to the mechanic, to the laborer, to the agriculturist, to—lots of 'em. And yet, Michigan, mind you, no common State, but the Wolverine State, has enacted a law that no intoxicating beverage shall be sold except for medicinal purposes."

"Say, I'd like to see you a minute," remarked a man, coming close to the physician.

"That you can," replied the doctor. "Right this way."

"I've got the ague," said the man in a low tone, when they had gone to the back of the store, "and I want something to break it up. I'd like to get some quinine and whisky."

"Good idea," assented Rorus. "Grand thing for ague, this quinquinia. I have it pure, too. I'll put them up separately and let you mix them, eh?"

The next event was the arrival of Wingscheut with his shambling limp.

"Helloa, Wingscheut," was the salutation of Jimmy Martin. "Have you been hunting horse-thieves or bears lately? Set down and give us a story."

"No," sturdily replied the German, "I'fe cot to see te toctor."

"Why," inquired Martin, "be you sick?"

"No," answered Wingscheut, "unt I ton't vant to pe sick. Tat's te reason I see te toctor. I vass pit vith a massauker 'unt I must have some visky."

"I want to speak a word with you," said a youth of not more than twenty, after Wingscheut had obtained his liquor.

"Come this way," said the doctor, going immediately to his consultation room.

"I'm at work on a marsh where there's lots of rattlesnakes," said the youth. "I'm afraid I'll be bit and maybe not get help till it's too late. I wish you'd let me have a pint of whisky."

"Can't do that," returned Rorus. "Can't do it possibly. It's against the law."

"I know it," pleaded the youth, "but maybe I'll die if you don't. You let the rest have it. I do my trading here, that is, everything you keep. I'll have to go somewhere else if you can't accommodate me a little."

"Human life," said the doctor, "must be preserved.

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quarreled with Ratke over the proposed punishment of the horse-thieves. "He'd be made short work of. The hull country's worked up, and they'd string a man, too, quick. What are you goin' to do about catchin' your colt?"

"I don't know what to do," replied Whipple. "I thought, though, that I'd go around and inquire and have my neighbors do the same. They've gone now from around my way. I'll go over to my brother-in-law's Bill Briggses, and he'll turn out. Maybe by going far enough some of us can hear where he's gone to."

The general attention was directed to a quarrel between Jimmy Martin and the youth who had used so much persuasion to obtain the bottle of whisky. Martin had stepped on the toes of the youth, whose name was Blake. Blake complained of the act and was told that he was a liar. He demanded an apology, which Martin refused to give. Thereupon he threw off his coat and vest, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, unbuttoned and turned down his shirt-collar and advanced in fighting attitude toward Martin, who made no preparation for the attack.

Dr. Rorus passed around the large round stove to separate the disputants. Grabbing each by the collar, he exclaimed, "What! Gen'lemen! Quarreling in a time of public danger, when the welfare and the safety of the community is at stake! Quarreling when our property and our rights and our sacred honor are at stake! for it's a question of honor, gen'lemen. You'll all say it's dishonorable to steal horses, won't you? Then it's dishonorable to let 'em be stole. Do you know what town you're in? Break o' Day, and Break o' Day has the fires of patriotism. You should be ready to leave off and lay aside and forget, you know, your little feuds and animosities. Would George Washington have stopped for a little fuss at Yorktown? Would Joseph Warren have paused for a racket, just a common blow-up, I mean, on the sacred soil of Bunker Hill? Do you suppose, my dear sir, that Mad Anthony Wayne would have stopped charging up Stony Point because some one stepped on his toe? Others may wrangle in a time of public calamity, but," he concluded with a leonine roar, "I. J. H. Rorus, never, no, never."

"You won't have to go to Bill's, Whipple," said the flaxen-whiskered man. "There he comes now."

"Well, Bill," said Whipple, as soon as the new-comer was in their midst, "I've lost my bay colt."

"I guess not," replied Briggs, at whose house Wrengell had stopped for breakfast. "He's in my barn now."

"No," cried Whipple. "Where did you find him?"

"In my field tagging after a fellow that come from the swamp. He said he got lost, and your colt followed him."

"I don't believe no such yarn," exclaimed Whipple. "He stole him, and the colt got away. What did he say about it, any way?"

Briggs, with considerable exaggeration, gave an account of his interview with John, dwelling particularly on the way in which the latter had withheld his name and place of residence. "He was covered with mud from head to foot," said Briggs, "and he had scratches on his face and hands. I'm inclined to think he and his pards had a disagreement. It wouldn't be strange if that's how he come to roll in the mud and get the scratches. While he was eating, I skipped around through the fields and come here."

The drugstore was in a state of tumult. The chairs were deserted, and the men stood, some lethargic with drink, some talking boisterously and urging immediate action.

"We'll go right down there and get him," said Whipple, "and we'll hear what he has to say for himself. If he can't tell a straight story, he may as well say his prayers."

"That's the talk," exclaimed the flaxen-whiskered man. "We may just as well make an example of him. That's what we swore to do with the first one we caught."

"We ain't sure that he stole him," said Briggs, who was alarmed at the effect his words were producing, and who that day learned to his regret that it is easier to incite than to appease the fury of a drunken mob. "I don't know but most any one would look suspicious if he was mudded up and scratched up that way."

"Trot out your rope," yelled young Blake. "Less be a-going."

"Now, doctor," said Whipple, "it's my treat. I want you to set out the best you've got for the boys, a glass around. This kind of a thing don't happen very often, you know."

"Exceptions to all rules," commented Rorus. "Yes, I'll do it once, Whipple. It's like violating the constitution, that grand instrument, that bundle of wisdom, a heap in it, too. You can do that when it's a military necessity. This is a civil necessity."

"There he is coming now," said Briggs, when the glasses which had been set out by Rorus had been drained. "But I wouldn't be too rough on him, boys. I'd turn him over to the law."

"No law to-day," replied the flaxen-whiskered man.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VILLAGE HAS A SENSATION.

THE rain had quite dried from the withered grass in the road when Wrengell left the residence of Briggs. Some men in a meadow at the right were stirring hay, which would soon be fit to haul. In a field belonging to a farm adjoining, a reaper was doing the first work in harvest which John had seen that year.

It was not until Wrengell entered Break o' Day that he bethought himself of his rough exterior. Had he considered in time, he would have gone through the fields, thus avoiding the village, but it was now too late to do so. Several loungers on the veranda of the hotel stared at him, and one of them put down his paper and spoke to the landlord about the mud-besmeared passer-by. John met Manie's friend, Miss Holmes, as she was coming from Birch & Bigney's store. She bowed pleasantly, but she was, he fancied, ashamed of their acquaintance.

Wrengell was annoyed by the scrutiny of some men who were peering from a yellow building which bore the sign, I. J. H. Rorus. Their curiosity, which bordered on impertinence, was indicated by earnest gestures and one or two outstretched fingers which pointed directly toward him. Used, as he had been, to snubs, he was not accustomed to such insolent demonstrations ; and he returned glances of defiance to the group at the door of the drug-store. His fearless demeanor prevented for a brief season the aggressive movement which was intended. The men stood parleying on the steps, some rhetorical, some argumentative, others fiercely denunciatory, each heedless of all opinions save his own, none succeeding in making himself well understood.

" Helloa, there," called Whipple, just as John had passed them. " What's your name ? "

The salutation was not the one most likely to propitiate an individual who considered that he had already been the subject of interest far too intense to be polite.

"When I am satisfied that you have a right to demand an answer, I will give it," replied John.

"We'll see whether we have a right to question you," said the flaxen-whiskered man, jumping from the steps. "Come on, boys. Now will you tell us what your name is?"

"No," returned John. "Get out of my way, or I'll break some of your heads."

"If I was in your place, I wouldn't be so cranky," said Briggs. "That colt that followed you out of the swamp last night was stole, and some of 'em think you took him."

"If that is the case," said John, "I recognize your right to ask the question. Mr. Boyle knows me, do you not, Mr. Boyle?"

"I never saw you before," answered the sullen Alf, who had joined the throng.

"Why, I was at your house last night," protested John. "Mr. Durgenson introduced us."

"You wasn't there last night, nor never," affirmed Alf; "anyway you never was when I was there."

The crowd hooted and jostling against one another, endeavored to press closer to Wrengell.

"Grab him," yelled the flaxen-whiskered man.

It was advantageous to John that his enemies were packed closely about him. Had they been excited by a rush, it is impossible to say what violence they would have done. The seizure was merely an extension of the captors' arms, to which John very quietly and sensibly submitted. Many who were unable to get near him picked up stones and clubs, staggered about and uttered loud threats.

"That is Dr. Rorus' drug-store," said John. "There is a man in there whom I know."

"What did you say?" inquired Briggs. "They make so much noise. Keep still a minute, boys, can't you?"

"Tell Loomis to come out," said John. "He knows me."

"Doctor," shouted Briggs, "where's Fred? This fellow says he knows him."

"Gone to Sharptown," said the doctor. "Won't be back till to-night. You had better confess this business, young man. The American people are a magnanimous people. They are a great people. Confess it, young man. If you do, Dr. Rorus is on your side. I tell you, when you've got him, you've got a host."

"I am one of Major Ratke's hired men," said John. "I have worked for him all summer and have formed some acquaintance, but none of them, except your clerk, live here."

The crowd, gathered from the scum of Break o'Day and the surrounding country, was gesticulating, contending, threatening. There were, indeed, several who tried to protect the unfortunate Wrengell from the general wrath. Inoffensive Jimmy Martin mildly protested that they ought to give him "a show for his life." Keen contrition was felt by Briggs for the account which he had given of John's exit from the swamp. He had much exaggerated the facts, and the exaggeration was likely to result in the murder of a man whom he believed he had grossly wronged.

"Boys," he called, "less see what he's got to say for himself. We don't want to hurt him till we find out whether he deserves it or not."

"Take him down to the tree," said the flaxen-whiskered man.

The party moved down the street to an oak, the spreading branches of which often afforded a shade to the villagers. Stakes had been driven, one under the tree, another a few paces from it, and around each had been worn depressions where the boys and men had pitched quoits.

"Where's a rope?" called Boyle. "Somebody git a rope."

Half the mob started up the village, leaving the rest to guard Wrengell. John saw no hope of rescue.

In the besotted, reddened faces around him was neither judgment nor mercy. Those who were least intoxicated were almost invariably hardest of heart by nature, and seemed to rejoice over the circumstances which had delivered the prisoner into their hands. Those who were naturally best disposed were, as a rule, too much overcome by drink to have an exact perception of justice. He resolved that, whatever pleasure they derived from his execution, they should not have the satisfaction of seeing him weaken at the last moment. He would die unflinchingly, without a word of entreaty. If the ruffians expected to witness his dejection or terror, they should be disappointed. If in the death-struggle his body yielded to the convulsions of expiring nature, it should be when it was no longer presided over by his will. To the south of him lay the swamp which he had been so anxious to leave. Its aspect, as he stood in the power of the brutal loungers, was far from forbidding to him. The tamaracks were in two phalanxes. In the first were the short trees with their conical figures, standing the advance guard of a mighty host. The next were of high stature, but irregular in form, their tops lacking the gradual taper which beautified those in the first body. Beyond these, like giants in the rear of a throng, were the upland woods, looking down on the outskirts of the hamlet, where savage men were arranging a spectacle both fascinating and revolting.

Washington Street was in a tumult. A long inch rope had been obtained and grasped by many hands, was being carried to the intended gallows. Several business men of the town were accompanying the roughs and vainly expostulating on the precipitancy of their action. Wingscheut was with them, delivering a narrative only part of which could be distinguished above the uproar. John was about to reckon on a certificate of good character from his fellow-laborer, when he reflected that the German had mistrusted him of having secured his discharge from Ratke's. The vigilance of those about him had lessened. They had scattered and were intent on inspecting the body advancing with the rope. His left arm was clutched fiercely by Boyle; his right was held in an indifferent grasp by young Blake, who was between him and the tamaracks.

Suddenly he jerked loose his right hand and planted it on the jaw of Boyle, who fell, momentarily stunned. As he whirled about, Blake quickly moved aside. The only one now in his way was Briggs; and his interviewer of the early morning, glad that he could partly nullify the effect of his misrepresentation, purposely stumbled over a stone and allowed him to pass unmolested. Wrengell barely touched the fence in leaping it. With light feet and swift steps he ran toward the swamp, in the brush and quagmires of which he might find protection. The disappointed mob, uttering yell after yell of rage, started in pursuit. Among other cries John could plainly discern those of Wingscheut, who did not recognize the fugitive, "Cetch te tam horse-tief. Cetch te tam horse-tief."

The distance between him and the rabble was increasing. He could not understand why they spread far to the left and right, unless it were to prevent him from escaping in either direction lengthwise of the swamp. The course which he took was undeviating. Some lazy cattle directly ahead of him dashed out of his way as he ran almost against them. Two men, one cradling and one binding, were at work in a small field of wheat on a southern slope. John raced straight through a few rods from them, leaving a path of lodged grain behind him. The owner of the field, who was cradling, called to know "why in the name of all possessed he was trampin' down his wheat." Undaunted by this inquiry, Wrengell descended the hill and passed into the shelter of some willow bushes, where he moderated his pace to a walk. Although this was the asylum which he had sought, he was impatient at the impediments to his progress and more uneasy than when he could watch the movements of his enemies. He felt relieved as he entered the body of low tamaracks which he had viewed from Break o' Day. But he could not stop there. Every jungle, every fallen tree-top, in fact every foot of ground was liable carefully to be searched. In the large tamaracks, where there was less underbrush, he went with more rapidity.

A gleam of water was before him. He was nearing a lake, which with an area of half a section effectually barred his advance. The sound of voices at his right prevented him from wheeling and skirting along the bank. He, without practice as a swimmer, was on a point of land surrounded by the water and his foes. In his pocket was a revolver which he had obtained in a trade with Daggett, a cheap, rusted weapon, the cylinder of which had to be turned by hand each time it was fired. His pursuers, almost in sight, were crashing through the swamp. He had decided to turn, draw his revolver and stake his chance of escape on one determined charge, when across the point of land, through the thin growth of trees, he discovered a boat. Not a minute did he occupy in crossing the cape, but rapid as was his progress, it did not bring him first on the spot which he wished to reach. Young Blake and a companion gained the dock, barely in advance of him, and stood, panting, to intercept his flight. With a flourish of his revolver he dashed at the young men, who scrambled precipitately to land, unheeding water, mud and reputation for courage. John's haste was nearly as great as that of the foes whom he had frightened. Slipping on the narrow dock, which was composed of a few poles, he fell into the water, regaining his footing as Alf Boyle emerged from the tamaracks. To his discomfiture he found the boat locked. He must act with decision, for a reinforcement of roughs was but a few rods distant. He seized the chain and pulled with his entire strength, but the fastening remained secure. In desperation he clutched a paddle and pushed. The chain straightened, the lock gave way; the momentum had accomplished what the steady force could not.

Alf in the mean time had traversed the dock. His eye, which the night before had avoided John, was now fixed upon him with a brute ferocity. Seeing the boat sheering away from him, he sprang into the lake and grasped its gunwale, nearly overturning it. At the instant he was raising himself to clamber on board, he received from John's paddle a blow on the head, which loosened his hold and obliged him to seize the dock to keep from sinking. Several young men leaped into the lake, but they were kept from a near approach to John by the splashing of water into their faces and the sight of the paddle, which was menacingly uplifted. The gathering mob cast curses and sticks at the fugitive, but the demonstrations only showed their present impotence to do him harm. It was fortunate for John that there were no fire-arms among them; for, had they possessed them, they certainly would not have hesitated to use them.

Wrengell, perspiring and fatigued from his long run, did not feel at liberty to pause. He did, however, wait long enough to remove his coat and vest, which had much impeded his flight. Near the opposite shore and a considerable distance apart were two boats laden with fishermen. After repeated signaling and shouting they understood that they were expected to stop an escaping horse-thief. They unfastened the chains from the anchoring poles and guided their vessels so as to bring them across Wrengell's route. In an emergency rashness is sometimes safer than caution. John altered his course, steering directly for the nearer craft. Amazed at his audacity, the fishermen slackened their speed. Wrengell was within what he considered good rifle range when, turning the rusted cylinder of his revolver and elevating the muzzle, he fired. He was little practiced and had no dexterity in pistol-shooting, but to his astonishment and their dismay, the bullet struck close to the prow of the foremost boat. Careful to turn the weapon slightly to one side, he fired a second time ; and the missile, whizzing past them, struck the water with a cutting plunge. The paddles which propelled the craft stopped moving, and the occupants looked from one to another in mute inquiry. While they were deliberating, Wrengell pulled toward them as if he were anxious for an encounter. Convinced that they were dealing with one of the most bloodthirsty of horse-thieves, who was bent on slaughtering the entire party, they paddled manfully to the eastern end of the lake. Those in the second boat, finding themselves unsupported, made off in the direction of the western extremity. The crafts skirted the opposite ends of the lake, so as to be well out of reach of the dreaded outlaw, and in response to the frantic shouting and waving of hats crossed over to transport the crowd at the dock.

John strengthened the impression which he had made by sending after them two more shots. He then struck out for the southern shore, where he halted a moment to rest. The fishermen were making their best time to relieve the impatience of the waiting party. Messages were yelled back and forth, but most of them came from the shore, for the men on the water were putting forth too much other exertion to indulge freely in vocalization.

Wrengell threw his coat and vest into the tall grass, and after a short pause continued his way. The swamp at this place offered no security. Above or below him he believed it to be denser and he determined to go to the eastward, away from the rabble of Break o' Day, away from the only community which had ever really respected him, away from the woman whom he loved, whose love he had hoped to secure. His appearance with the colt at Briggs' at such an hour and in such a condition, his refusal to tell his identity at the village, the absence of the slightest evidence to explain his whereabouts during the latter portion of the night must tell heavily against him should an accusation be preferred. He had shown the bearing of a hardened desperado. He had turned savagely on those who sought to retake him, as if he had become accustomed to conflicts in following unlawful occupations. He had fired upon and barely missed inoffensive fishermen, whose only aggressiveness to him had been that with no hostile demonstration they had presumed to come within range of his revolver. His dreams of respectability were dissipated. The public would inquire about his antecedents, and his miserable parentage would be made known. With his deformed foot, with the criminal record of his father and his mother, with his own perpetuity of the family reputation for felony how could he win esteem ? He decided to go to the higher ground, which, because of its superior footing, he would follow for several miles, returning to the swamp when he had traversed that space.

A short walk brought him to the elevated forest which he had viewed from the village. He was on the watershed of the lower Michigan peninsula. The lake which he had crossed was one of a series emptying through Huron River into Erie. The streams on the opposite side of the table-land went westward and, passing around Mackinac through the upper part of the great lake-chain, arrived at the same destination.

The wide spaces between the high tamaracks below John allowed him to see the surface of the water, which was hardly disturbed by a ripple. The boats had started to recross. Filled with excited men and impelled by clumsy substitutes for oars, including poles and boards, they veered from side to side as the misdirected efforts of the rival paddlers alternately prevailed.

John started through the woods on a trot, which he intended to maintain for an hour. He had no apprehension that they would immediately overtake him, for he had fairly outrun them at the beginning of the race. His greatest fear was that some of them would procure horses and, proceeding along the road, head him off, after which they would make a diligent search. He arrived presently at a field, which he deemed it injudicious to cross. In order to avoid exposing himself to view he was obliged to sheer farther from the swamp, passing along the edge of the timber. The field at his left gave place to a growth of bushes and small trees. Not exactly liking the route which he had chosen, he climbed a fence for the purpose of entering the thicket. He stood a moment on the top rail, listening for the sounds of pursuit. As he was about to descend, the rotten rail broke and he was precipitated heavily to the ground. He strove to rise, but a sharp pain shot through his ankle, which refused to bear his weight. He was crippled and defenseless, and near him were enemies who, if they were before relentless, were now exasperated. He had fallen at the edge of a blackberry thicket, the paths of which at frequent intervals indicated that the place was much visited. In the hope of finding a jungle which might screen him, he crawled for a few feet, but the briars which pierced his hands soon induced him to try another mode of travel. His next experiment was hopping, which had also its disadvantages. The bushes caught in his clothes, threw him off his balance, and aggravated the pain in his injured limb. He again went on his hands and knees, regardless of the injury to his flesh. As he was thus advancing, he came without warning near a woman, who with her back toward him was picking berries.

With the intention of silently stealing away he partly arose and was about to execute his purpose, when the berry-picker, hearing a slight noise, turned around and faced him. An exclamation of surprise, which bordered on alarm, burst from the woman, who was Mrs. Boyle.

But she quickly recovered her composure as she perceived that her rough-looking visitor was the young man in whom she had been so interested the preceding night. Her countenance expressed some displeasure, which undoubtedly arose from her inability to understand why Wrengell should use such secrecy in his approach.

"They are after me!" exclaimed John, "a crowd of drunken men! They think I am a horse-thief! You can hear them in the woods yonder."

"They are coming," said Mrs. Boyle, in a frenzied manner. "I don't know where you can hide. What shall we do? Oh, dear! What shall we do?"

CHAPTER XX.

A GOOD SAMARITAN.

"Quick!" said Mrs. Boyle. "They'll be here in a few minutes. I know where you can hide. Come on. Oh, dear! You can't come. Lean on my shoulder."

With the help of Mrs. Boyle John made his way through the bushes. His lame ankle was frequently twisted in his haste. The briars scratched the hands and faces both of him and of his companion. She conducted him to a brush pile which was nearly grown over with running blackberry vines; and letting go his arm, she threw back the trailing cover from the dry sticks and leaves, among which she hastily prepared a place for his reception. John lay down on the heap, where he was covered by the brush which Mrs. Boyle had removed and lastly by the long vines, the meshes of which made the signs of the disturbance less conspicuous.

"They're right here," said the lady hurriedly. "I'll run to the house and stay till they've gone, and then I'll come back."

Mrs. Boyle hastened to the house, which she began to sweep. While she was thus engaged, Alf, with several companions, came to the door. Their faces were red, their coats and vests had been taken off, their shirts were drenched with perspiration.

"Have you seen a feller go by here?" inquired Boyle.

"What kind of looking man?" asked Mrs. Boyle.

"I don't care a —— what kind of a lookin' feller," returned Alf. "Have you seen anybody go by?"

"No, I haven't," said Mrs. Boyle.

"Some folks never see nothin'," said Alf, as he started away. "Come on, boys. He's gone on, I guess."

"Will you be back to dinner, Alfred?" inquired Mrs. Boyle.

" 'Tain't none o' your bisness when I'll be back," answered Alf. "I ain't no little boy that's bound to give an account for every step I take."

Other men shortly followed, scattering along as they varied in the respective qualities of speed, endurance and determination. It was more than an hour before all the stragglers had passed the house. Those who were last had waited for the third trips of the fishing-boats, or had been delayed by going around the lake. As soon as Mrs. Boyle considered it safe to do so, she went to the hiding-place where she had left Wrengell. She wondered, when she reached the spot, that it had not been marked by the pursuing parties. The vines had been drawn over the brush with such haste that some of them were turned with the berries and upper sides of the leaves down. She removed the covering and assisted John to rise.

"You must have thought I would never come," she said. "They were so long in going by I didn't dare try it before. You see I've brought you some crutches. They may be too short for you, but I think you can use them. Alfred had them when he cut his foot. We will go to the house now."

"It will not do for me to go there,'' said John. "They will certainly find me if I do. How could I stay in the house with your son without being discovered?"

"You can't stay here," returned Mrs. Boyle. "They'll be back, and they'll hunt these brush all through. They won't think of looking for you in the house. Alfred doesn't stay there much. Sometimes he's away a week at a time. You can go up into the loft. There are no stairs and we never go up there; that is, we haven't been up for six months. Alfred got mad one time and he left the ladder up there. You see, there's nothing else you can do. You can't lie on the ground with that lame ankle, and besides, you'd be caught."

These arguments were convincing to John. In a few minutes he was in the loft. After his ascent, Mrs. Boyle thrust a chair through the opening, bidding him, as he valued his safety, to maintain perfect silence. She then directed John to draw up the ladder, and prepared to build a fire. The roof of the chamber was unsealed. Its inner portion was covered with rough boards, some of which were slabs. Built along them at frequent intervals, were wasp-nests whose dwellers were buzzing about the room.

In a few minutes Mrs. Boyle appeared. "We must have your boot off," she said.

"I have tried that," replied John, "but it will not come."

"We will have to cut it loose," said Mrs. Boyle. "Let me take your knife now, please."

With the knife she cut stitches and leather, and in a short time she gently removed the boot. She thought it advisable also to strip loose the stocking in the same way. The deformed foot was badly swollen. The sixth toe, the sole constituent of the deformity, was a squat, dwarfish body, sticking from an extensive puff. John, wearied by his long run and racked by suffering, was yet morbidly sensitive to an exposure of the misshapen part. Mrs. Boyle applied hot cloths to the injured ankle and handed him a bottle of camphor for application. She did not wound his feelings by an allusion to the malformation, nor did she appear to notice it. John could not explain her indifference to so unusual a sight. It argued either that she had perfect control over her actions, or that she had previously known of his misfortune.

"I see you haven't any coat or vest," said Mrs. Boyle. "Where did you leave them?"

"In the grass on this side of the lake," answered John. "I was very warm and I could run better with them off."

"Up by the dock where you can find them when you get well?"

"About two or three rods from it. I threw them near a large tree, and I will have no trouble in finding them."

"I am afraid it will be a long time before you can walk," said Mrs. Boyle. "You will have a tedious time of it. Be careful and don't wrench your ankle in the least. It will get well a great deal sooner provided you keep it perfectly still. I'll bring up your dinner now and mine, too. I didn't eat much when Alfred was here."

"Are you not afraid of eating with a horse-thief?" asked John.

"No," returned Mrs. Boyle, "you never stole horses. As soon as you feel strong enough, you must tell me how they came to accuse you of any such thing. They are almost all miserable men that I saw go by,—I mean the ones that I am acquainted with. I knew five or six of them, and only two are what people call good citizens."

John was cautioned by Mrs. Boyle not to get so close to a window as to be visible to a person outside. While they were eating, and while she kept watch on the several avenues by which the house was likely to be approached, he related a part of the adventures which he had experienced since they parted after their first meeting. He did not reveal the identity of the Wallaces, or allude to their conversation respecting Montcalm.

"It is a disgrace," said Mrs. Boyle, "that Dr. Rorus will drink and sell liquor so. He used to be called a smart man when he kept sober, but drink has nearly ruined his mind and his practice. No one ever sees him now, except when he has been drinking. Break o' Day used to be a peaceful place. Now they have awful fights there, and drunken men are around all the time. There is a law against selling liquor, but nobody tries to put it in force, although every one but the drunkards complain. Once in a while I think it's my duty to make legal complaint, but I do dread it so, and then Alfred, you know, he is, well, quick-tempered, he would be mad. I am afraid I don't always do as I ought to, just because it isn't pleasant."

John doubted that there was a just occasion for Mrs. Boyle's fear. He believed that she was incapable of committing a wrong act. He had never seen another countenance which had so much benignity, such an expression of self-forgetfulness and concern for the comfort of others. She kept a fire in the stove, and at intervals brought up hot water in which to dip the cloths for the swollen limb. Mrs. Boyle did not venture to eat supper with John in the loft. She was apprehensive lest Alf might change his mind and return when he was least expected. At sunset she carried a feather tick and some clothes to the chamber and arranged for John a comfortable bed. When this was done, she descended; and a few seconds later John heard her leave the house. Her absence was continued for an hour, but finally she reappeared in the loft with a bundle under her arm.

"I am mad," said John. "You have been to the lake after my coat and vest. You have worked so hard that you ought not to have gone down there, tramping through the grass."

"It did not hurt me in the least," said Mrs. Boyle. "I found them in five minutes."

Wrengell had reason to be thankful. He had escaped a vindictive mob, and if he had sustained injury, he had fallen into the hands of a good Samaritan who had dressed his wounds and paid his reckoning at an inn. Unused to sleeping among the strange noises which pervaded the forest, he lay awake the greater portion of the night. He heard, oft repeated, the hooting of an owl, sometimes distant, sometimes near, always monotonous. More interesting to him, because he did not know their origin, were the cries of two raccoons which were calling to each other from different parts of the wood.

It was after daylight when he awoke from the one brief nap which he had obtained. The wasps were humming about the apartment. Below, Mrs. Boyle was stepping about briskly preparing breakfast. John was in no hurry to rise, for he lacked a profitable occupation. He lay long looking up at the rough roof boards, on the surface of which were dark weather-stains and those rings which record the years of the oak. His left leg was useless for purposes of travel. He dressed, took his crutches and, heedless of the injunctions which Mrs. Boyle had given him, opened a window and leaned half his body outside. The clearing was bounded on two sides by brush. These surroundings might have been forbidding had they not been before a background of fine timber. Some industrious man had chopped off a considerable amount of ground. John reached the conclusion that Mrs. Boyle's husband had done the chopping and that her son was averse to using the ax and the brush-hook.

The window where Wrengell was seated looked out on a fine stretch of wood. The trees, which were mostly of oak, were clad in the full magnificence of summer. An unusual number of them had large, straight trunks, running many feet high without a limb and surmounted by well-formed, wide-spreading tops.

Near the edge of the timber a monster grape-vine was coiled about a sapling, nearly enveloping it and completely overspreading its branches at the top.

The tree was bent, as if its heavy burden had brought in youth the decrepitude of age. It was like some patient boy, who, deprived of recreation, sinks without a complaint under the weight of tasks, the endurance of which requires the strength of manhood.

A black squirrel, apparently attracted by the infrequent spectacle, hopped leisurely to the sapling, which he proceeded to climb. He worked his way through, and seated on the top mat of vines, began earnestly to chatter. When he tired of this situation, he leaped to the limb of a large white oak and again sounded his calls. He was joined by another squirrel, which chased him round and round the body of the tree. The second arrival made only a short stay, but the first lingered after the departure of his companion. Going to the extreme end of a long limb which reached within a few feet of the house, he looked mischievously in at the window. John was pleased with the innocent gambols of the animal. He was about to push his head through the window, from which he had withdrawn, when the report of a gun rang out and the squirrel tumbled to the ground. As helplessly floundering, the little creature strove to escape, Alf rushed up and catching him by the tail struck his head several times against the tree. He continued the blows until the last shudder had passed through the inanimate frame.

John, looking through a knot-hole in the side of the house, feared that Alf might see the open window and mistrust the presence of a stranger. He knew by the brutality which he had so often witnessed that the ruffian, if he could avoid the penalties of the law, would delight in taking his life. After Alf had disappeared from his view, he crawled forward to let down the sash, but at that moment he heard his step below.

"Here's a squirrel, ma," said Boyle. "Can you cook him for breakfast?"

"I won't have time to dress him," replied Mrs. Boyle. "I'll cook him for dinner."

"No, you don't have time for nothin'," rejoined Alf. "It can't keep you very busy to cook for two. I won't be here to dinner. I s'pose, though, you can eat him all yourself if you want to."

"Why can't you be here at dinner?" asked Mrs. Boyle. "Don't you think I ever get lonesome?"

The conversation between Alf and Mrs. Boyle was limited. As the young man was about to leave, he said:

"I want a dollar."

"I can't very well spare it," replied Mrs. Boyle.

"I've got to have it," returned Alf. "They ain't no use o' talkin', I must have it."

"I have use for it. It was only last Monday that I let you have two dollars."

"That ain't got nothin' to do with to-day. If I didn't need it, I wouldn't ask you. You might just as well git it as to fool around, for I won't be monkeyed with."

Mrs. Boyle reluctantly procured the desired sum for Alf, who departed on receiving it. She looked troubled when she brought John his breakfast.

Wrengell's quarters were tolerably comfortable. He had not, indeed, many luxuries. Mrs. Boyle furnished him a few books, but they were of a character such as, it must be confessed, is interesting to few young persons. They were religious works, treatises on piety, and biographies of religious people. A strong recommendation for perusing them, however, was the daily life of the woman by whom they were read. She was never idle, and rarely working for her own benefit. She daily visited the sick woman, Mrs. Blake, and John guessed that she carried her medicine, delicacies and staple provisions. There were, besides, others to whom she ministered. She did not tell John of her charity, but he saw direct and circumstantial evidence to convince him that his surmises were correct. One afternoon a small boy came to her house and alluded to a coat which she had given him.

John was awakened the fourth night after his arrival by the gruff voice of Alf in the lower room. The worth-less fellow was repeating his demand for money, which Mrs. Boyle was resisting.

"You want to know about every cent I spend," he said, "just as though I was a two-year-old young one. I thank you, I ain't tied to your apron-strings now."

"I can't give it to you to-night, Alfred," said Mrs. Boyle.

"Can't is a big word with you," said Alf. "That's what you say every time, but you manage to find money when you want to. I've got to have it to-night because I'm goin' away. I won't be back in a week, maybe never,"

"Why, what have you been doing?" cried Mrs. Boyle. "You have got into trouble."

"S'posin' I have," said Alf. "I can git out of it without consultin' you. You git what I want, and I'll manage the rest."

"I have let you have all I can," replied Mrs. Boyle. "I'm afraid you don't make good use of it."

"It don't make no difference what use I make of it," returned Alf. "If you don't git it, I'll burn your ole shanty down. Now you can bet your boots on that."

"It is the Lord's," returned Mrs. Boyle firmly, "and I must keep it."

"Then, if it's His, he hadn't ought to have it layin' round here," said the profane Alf.

"Oh, Alfred," cried the distressed woman, "how can you be so wicked? I have tried to bring you up right and cried about you and give you more than I keep myself. But this I have promised to apply to the Lord's purpose. Don't talk so, and don't try to make me sin by breaking my promises!"

"Be you a-goin' to git me that money?" asked Alf.

"No," said Mrs. Boyle, "it is God's and I must keep it."

Alf was furious with rage. He uttered a savage oath, raised his fist, struck her a blow which sent her reeling against the wall and ran from the room. As soon as the dispute threatened a serious termination, John arose and began to dress. The blow from Alf's fist was struck just before he reached the opening which led below.

Without waiting to use the ladder he lowered himself by his hands, falling in a heap on the floor.

"Where has he gone?" cried John. "I will teach him better than that!"

"Oh, stop, John!" Mrs. Boyle pleaded, sobbing in spite of her efforts to be calm. "You mustn't say anything! You must keep still or he will kill you!"

"But I will not keep still," replied John. "He struck you, and I will punish him. I will shoot him!"

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Boyle, "you wouldn't shoot my son?"

"He is not your son," answered John. "No such mother ever had such a son."

CHAPTER XXI.

CONTROVERSY AND REMINISCENCE.

THE affair at Break o' Day caused more excitement than the murder of Green, and was the most notable event which had happened in the vicinity that season. Representatives of the Jackson and Ann Arbor Press visited the hamlet, which in a few weeks acquired more reputation than it had hitherto gained in half a century. From Wingscheut a reporter obtained a sensational and valuable budget of news. His paper stated that the valiant German had been fated singularly often to meet the horse-thieves, that in the spring he had an encounter with them when they were escaping with a horse at the barn of a farmer named Spartus, that in the swamp near Break o' Day he maintained, unarmed and unaided, a combat with four of them, and that, had he been properly supported, the entire gang might have been captured.

The Jackson "Goad," a sheet published with the avowed purpose of prodding beyond endurance the party then in power, was especially active in making inquiries about Wrengell. It gave a highly colored account of the young man's sojourn at Ratke's. It dwelt minutely on his reticence respecting his former residence and occupation. It declared that a man unused to deeds of violence could never show such nerve and determination as he had manifested. It related how he had been detained by the order-loving citizens of Break o' Day, how he had broken loose from their restraint, knocking them right and left, how he had fearlessly charged upon and driven back a group of men at the dock, how he had sought an encounter with the boats and had done some phenomenally close shooting at long range.

The major was wroth at the wrong done his hired man. He visited Rorus and talked to him with such sternness that the doctor did not as usual reply in a long series of co-ordinate terms capped by an anti-climax. He told him that he should hold him responsible for the injury which Wrengell received, and that if one of his men ever again was subjected to so much as an affront at the drug-store, he would administer a personal castigation to its proprietor. Directly after the appearance of the exaggerated article in the "Goad" Ratke called on the editor and demanded that retraction be made at once. The next week the story was modified; but after it was shorn of its absolute untruths, it still bore strong testimony against Wrengell.

The startling occurrences which agitated Ratke's neighbors did not keep him from the contemplation of his inventions. He had engaged an Oakville blacksmith to iron his Jerusalem wagon, which he decided to take in pieces and put on another vehicle for transportation. As the several parts were too heavy to be lifted easily by one man, he ordered Jake to assist him.

"I expect to create a sensation with my wagon in a few weeks, Jake," said the philosopher. "If it becomes famous, you can boast that you had a hand in preparing the first perfect model."

"Put this 'ere rattletrap in the hind end?" asked Jake, as he picked up a pair of wheel-posts, seemingly unconscious of his honorable function.

"Now, Jake," said the major, when he was ready to start to Oakville, "you may haul the wood which you and John sawed. I would like to be able to say that my inventions are used to a great extent on my farm. You may draw the wood with the Old Jerusalem. I intend to go to Jackson, and shall no doubt be gone until five o'clock."

Jake had a special aversion to the products of his employer's genius. With rebellion in his heart he hitched a team to the Old Jerusalem. He had driven but a few rods when the reach came unfastened and letting one end of the box fall to the ground, slid him speedily down the smooth bottom boards. Many minutes were occupied in readjusting the detached parts. Impatient of delay, he climbed on the wagon and spoke sharply to the team, but the tongue with the whiffletrees was jerked loose, and he was nearly pulled from his position by the lines. The last accident intensified his disgust, which he had before restrained with difficulty. He hitched the horses to a pair of trucks, and with this equipment hauled the wood in the forenoon some hours sooner than the major thought the work would be completed.

Ratke, who drove no farther than Oakville, returned to the farm at eleven o'clock. After caring for his team, he went to the field where Montcalm was at work.

"Trace," said the major, "that article which you sent to the Indianapolis "Standard" will greatly benefit me. You described my wagon in fine terms. You could never have obtained its insertion if you had not once been a reporter for the paper. Such an account coming from a distance will make me and my inventions respected more at home. A great name, to be acquired in one's own neighborhood, must be imported. We may call this the endosmose of reputation."

In passing the barns Ratke noticed that the trucks were not in their accustomed place under a shed. His anger was kindled at sight of Jake, who was throwing off his last load of wood from another vehicle than the Old Jerusalem.

"Jake," said the displeased inventor, hurrying to the wood-pile, "I told you expressly to use the Old Jerusalem. Why did you take the trucks?"

"'Cause," replied Sheppard, "I wanted to git done some time to-day. I didn't like to fuss."

"I pay you for your time," returned Ratke. "When you do as I tell you, it is my lookout if your service is unprofitable. After this you use the tool I give you to work with."

"I don't like no such 'rangement as the Jerus'lem," rejoined Jake. "The ole thingumbob ain't good for nothin', an' never was."

"Jake," said the major, "it is not your place to question the wisdom of my plans. I am quite capable of directing my own affairs. Whenever you are unwilling to obey my instructions, you may quit my employ."

"I guess I better quit now," said Jake. "We never had no words till to-day, an' we never want none."

"How much do I owe you?" inquired the major.

"You ain't paid me nothin' for two years," answered Sheppard, "an' there's some back that I earnt afore that."

"Is that so?" ejaculated the major, ashamed that he was unable to pay his discharged hired man. "I will get it for you as soon as I can, Jake."

"They gener'ly make reckonin' on payin' a man when they ship him," said Jake, "but you needn't be in no hurry about it. I'll let you know when I want it."

"Never mind throwing off the wood," said the major. "Come in to dinner. I will have Mark take care of the team."

"I'm much obliged," returned Jake. "I'll take care of 'em myself and finish up my job at the wood. I don't care for no dinner. I've et in that house for nine years, but 'tain't likely I'll ever eat there agin."

The major found visitors awaiting him in the house, Senator Mallard and Mrs. Baldwin, a sister of the statesman's deceased wife. Mallard's whole aspect was one of strength, both physical and mental. He was heavily built, though not corpulent. His face was smooth-shaven. His mouth was peculiarly expressive, indicating according to his mood, pleasure, approbation, sarcasm, disdain or wrath. His eyes were large and dark, and over them rose a brow which was broad and steep. While he was yet a young man, he had been prominent in state politics. Very soon after he had entered the United States Senate, he was ranked as a power in debate; and in a few years he was a recognized party leader. The idol of his friends, he was hated by many of his opponents whose opinions had been roughly handled by his aggressive speeches.

The greeting between the old men was cordial. They had many questions to ask, answers to return and experiences to relate. Since their last meeting one had increased in wealth and influence, one had virtually lost his property, each had been bereft of a wife, and each had grown gray, though he had retained his bodily vigor. Mrs. Grippin had to repeat her summons to dinner several times before it was responded to by the major and his guest. Ratke quite forgot everything except his friend and the scenes through which they had mutually passed. He talked with such abstraction, as he waited on the visitors, that he was unfitted for his duty. He placed potatoes on the plate intended for Mrs. Baldwin, one at about every four words. He had the dish well rounded when he was stopped by Mrs. Grippin, and the second interference of his sister alone saved the vegetables from being deluged with a profuse quantity of gravy. After dinner he and Mallard went back of the house, where they seated themselves on the wood-pile and talked for half the afternoon.

"Well, George," said the major, "I suppose you are confident of being re-elected in January."

"I am confident that I shall not again be re-elected," replied Mallard. "For nearly forty years, with scarcely an intermission I have been a public servant. Now I have a right to demand that my condition shall be changed from serfdom to independence."

"There are many who aspire to be tied with the bonds of national servitude," said the major. "The official has too much authority properly to be called a slave. He dictates to those whom you term his masters."

"Neither all nor the greater part of political power," returned Mallard, "is wielded by officials acting in an official capacity. Behind the officer is the will of the public, and behind that is the moulding influence of the Press and of those thinkers who study and expound matters of government. When the honest legislator finds that his conscience and popular sentiment are antagonistic, it is his duty to yield to the former; but he who habitually disregards the wishes of his constituents will soon destroy his political career."

"The responsibility to constituents," said Ratke, "is our great safeguard against usurpation. Were it not for that, the Republican party would be wholly unscrupulous in its disregard of precedent. The organization of which you are a leader has repeatedly violated the constitution and is advocating principles which, if carried out, will eventually lead to monarchy."

This provoked a spirited reply from Mallard, which in turn elicited a long answer from Ratke.

"James," called Mrs. Grippin, "I'll have to have some wood now."

"All right, Maria," said the major. "There is no warrant in the constitution for such dictatorial laws as have been enacted. Quote, if you can, a single passage which justifies them."

"Very well," answered Mallard, 'Congress shall have power to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this constitution in the government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.' The specification in an instrument like the constitution of every power of a legislative body is quite impracticable, on account of the limited space in the instrument and the inability of its framers to tell with any certainty what exigencies may arise. This provision, had it not been inserted, would have to be assumed, for no government could long prosper without the ability to enact special laws."

"James," said Mrs. Grippin, who was kept by the presence of her visitors from an outburst of passion, "I'm waiting for that wood."

"You shall have it," answered Ratke, methodically picking up two sticks and advancing to the kitchen. 'To make all laws which shall be necessary and proper.' The Republican party ignores that word proper. It interprets the clause thus ! 'To make such laws as best serve our partisan purposes.' An undue concentration of national authority," he continued, elevating his voice as he entered the kitchen, "is incompatible with good government. There should be a diffusion of power."

"Oh, dear ! What a man !"exclaimed Mrs. Grippin. "Two sticks of wood to do a baking. Now you go right back and get me some wood."

"I can carry the larger load," said Mallard, laughing, as Ratke descended the back steps. "In our younger days we tried feats of strength, but I am not used to them now."

Each man took in a huge armful of wood, and Mrs. Grippin was satisfied both with the quality and quantity of the supply. The housekeeper took pains to find several tasks for her brother, that the discussion might be, broken off and he might not be worsted by Mallard, for, though she professed great dislike of his argumentative habits, she was secretly proud of his proficiency.

" George," said the major, when they had left the house, " a great career is sometimes late in its commencement, is it not ? "

" Certainly," responded Mallard, " history furnishes many such instances."

" I believe," said Ratke, " that mine is about to begin. Did I tell you that I have turned a part of my attention to literature ? "

" No, indeed," answered the senator with some surprise. " Which one of the muses has captivated you ? Are you pondering over the massive tomes of Themis, are you under the spell of Polyhymnia's rhetoric, or are you following the voice of Calliope as she leads you over fields, through forests and across lakes, by ancient earthworks and mounds, in which are the relics of extinct races. This locality, I think, would furnish to a strong imagination material for a grand epic."

" Your guess is incorrect," said Ratke. " The title of the work which I am writing is ' Naturæ Concordia Philosphiæ Animi.' In two volumes I am undertaking to prove that every phenomenon of nature has a corresponding one in the human mind or soul. Volume one treats of the relativity of physics and metaphysics, volume two, of the relation of physical laws to the will and higher emotions. The moral treatise I finished first, more than a year ago, in fact.

" In its preparation I was obliged to refer to no modern language except our own. English is rich in dissertations on the soul, but it furnishes little to the science of mental phenomena. In order to master the metaphysical part I was obliged to read a great deal in German. You know I am deficient in that language. I was helped in my reading by Manie and by Wrengell, the young fellow who made such a stir at Break o' Day."

That night the old men sat up until after twelve o' clock talking of experiences which stretched through fifty years, of college days, of books which were but half remembered, of sports long unpracticed, but still unforgotten, of acquaintances, some of whom were living, some dead, some honored, some disgraced. Their faces kindled with the fervor of youth, their tones and gestures were animated; they were no longer old. They laughed at ludicrous circumstances with greater zest than when they witnessed the incidents. Unrealized ambitions, triumphs in the lyceum and in class-room, petty dissensions with their fellows, they reviewed with a minuteness which they could not have used in describing later events. At every visit since their graduation, they had gone over these same experiences. Each recital had exceeded its predecessor in the pleasure which it had imparted and the earnestness with which it had been delivered. Only three days before, Mallard had made in Chicago a great speech, which was destined to be published in the papers throughout the entire country and to be repeated in substance on the platform by the minor satellites of his party. Now his dignity was laid aside, he was mirthful, even boyish, in his actions.

"George," said Ratke, "you remember that we confided our aspirations to each other. Mine have promised much, but yielded nothing. You have accomplished what you set out to accomplish. You must be a happy man."

"You judge too hastily," returned Mallard. "I have money, I have a fair measure of reputation, but I have been unfortunate in my family affairs. I had a wife, a perfect companion, one of the best helpmeets whom God ever gave to man. She is dead. I had a son, gifted and promising. I kept him at school and gave him every advantage. He excelled in his studies. He had a special liking for rhetoric and argument. I meant to train him to be a statesman. I believed that he would exceed me in fame and power as Alexander exceeded Philip. But he took to drink. He died a disgraceful death, and the world knows my shame. I had a daughter who was as amiable as she was beautiful and accomplished. After the death of my wife and son, she was my idol. For a year she took music lessons at Detroit. When she came home, she told me about some attentions which had been paid her by a young foreigner, a German. I cautioned her to accept no more of his addresses until I had seen him. One day I was discussing the slavery question with some gentlemen in a hotel. You know before the war I was not in favor of immediate abolition. I was advocating the principles of the Republican party, when a young abolitionist commenced to talk in the most fanatical manner. I answered him, and he returned a torrent of abuse. Saying that I had no wish to discuss a question with one who substituted invective for argument, I left him. A few days after this occurrence I opened the door of my house and found in the parlor the young man who had treated me so rudely in the hotel. I bade him go and never enter my dwelling again. I asked Eliza if this impudent German was her suitor. She said he was. I told her to hold no communication with him, that if she did, she could no longer stay under the protection of my roof. A week after that they eloped. I made no attempt to follow them, but Eliza wrote me that they had gone to Detroit, and the newspapers, of course, tracked them up and put in every mouth the story of my new disgrace. I would have welcomed them back had it not been for my positive declaration that I would not do so. I heard nothing more of them until my sister-in-law found an item in a paper which stated that they had been killed two months previously in a railroad accident at Chicago. An enterprising reporter had had his attention riveted by the names of the victims, as they appeared in an old paper and had discovered that they were the same which had been borne by my son-in-law and daughter. The surmise of the reporter was correct. I took up the bodies, which are now in the Lansing cemetery. Never measure happiness by fame or apparent success."

The next morning the major to no avail urged his guests to prolong their visit. He did, however, extract a promise that Mallard would make a more extended stay the succeeding summer. As the senator and Mrs. Baldwin were at the gate taking leave of the Ratkes, Panicky came trudging up with his satchels.

"Good morning, Senator," was the peddler's familiar salutation. "How do you come on?"

"Very well," answered Mallard. "How is your health, Mr. Dabney?"

"Extra," said Panicky. "I am exposed enough to kill

travelers. One little girl, who used her apron as a receptacle of sand, pulled the garment over her face and suddenly rising, jerked it down, throwing a cloud of dust almost against the fractious team. The horses jumped forward, determined to flee from the unwonted spectacle. They were in a fair way to be quieted when the whole troop of Takum's dogs, large and small, came bounding toward them with yelps and barks. They still would have been manageable by Mallard's strong arm had not accident aided them in their insubordination. The left-line snapped in twain, the unbalanced right pulled them to one side, a front wheel struck a large stone, and the buggy was overturned.

Panicky was whirled over in a summersault, his satchels, bumping and jingling, rolled down an incline, where one of them flew open; his knee struck a small stump which was inconveniently near. He groaned dismally for a moment; then, raising himself, began to wail: "Oh, dear! Oh, gosh! Oh, Jerusha! Oh, I'm dying! I'm dying! I'm dying!"

Mrs. Baldwin was unhurt. She turned at once to the assistance of her brother-in-law, whose form was stretched at full length, motionless and apparently lifeless. She lifted his head, she rubbed his hands, she called his name. His closed eyes did not open, he gave no sign of realizing her attentions. The Ratke family and Brown ran as soon as possible to the scene of the accident, Nora in advance of them all. They carried the senseless statesman back to the house which he had thought he might not again visit.

Bitterly did Ratke regret his expressed wish that, with or against his will, Mallard would soon return. The stalwart frame, the hands he had pressed in farewell, the features, the changes of which he had watched in controversy and shared in the revival of memories had, indeed, come back; but tied in the bonds of inertness, they could not return his words or feelings. He found, however, that his friend was not dead. In the course of an hour he had the satisfaction of seeing him sit up and of hearing him announce that he felt better.

Daggett was in the tamaracks by the road cutting poles when his attention was drawn by the sound of rapidly approaching hoofs. Dropping his ax, he rushed to the highway just in time to catch the runaway team. With some trouble he allayed their excitement and drove them back toward Ratke's. The overturned buggy and the groaning peddler were sufficient to explain the catastrophe.

"Helloa! What's up?" he exclaimed, as he neared Panicky, who was seated on the ground, holding his knee and rocking back and forth.

"Oh, I'm about dead!" moaned Panicky. "I'm fixed! My leg's broke! I know it is! Oh, that's awful! You don't know how I suffer! Oh, I'm laid up for life! Oh, I won't do another tap of work for six months!"

"I am agent for the Great American Panacea," said Daggett, advancing with a broken bottle, which had been left with the fractured part upward, so that it still retained a portion of its contents. "This medicine is compounded of pine, hemlock, tamarack, cedar and spruce, besides sovereign roots and herbs known to the medical fraternity. It cures cuts, bruises, sprains, wounds, incisions and all injuries to the flesh. It is also a sovereign remedy for asthma, bronchitis, tonsilitis, laryngitis and all throat diseases, besides being an excellent tonic for consumption, dyspepsia, liver-complaint, rheumatism, malaria, fever and ague."

"If your knee was like mine, you wouldn't make fun of it," returned Panicky. "Oh, the whole top of my knee's smashed! Oh, I won't do another tap of work for two months!"

"Oh, yes, you will," assured Daggett. "I'll have you on your feet in no time. I know a fellow over in Ingham, a log rolled over his leg, smashed the whole business fine, bones, skin, flesh and all. The doctor, he come to amputate it, but I got him to try a bottle of the panacea. Well, the next week was the Fourth of July, and he took the first prize for running at Lansing, and just a little while afterward he beat the best mile record by three seconds. Have a bottle, Mister. It isn't panicky. Panacea, sir, panacea. Panicky is where they get in a battle, you know."

"I guess I will rub some of the panacea on my knee," said the peddier, taking the broken bottle with a grin. "That feels a good deal better," he acknowledged, as he arose after applying his medicine. "It beats all how quickly it helps it," he said, limping to his satchels and beginning to gather up the uninjured portion of his wares. "You'll know just what to do for lameness," he concluded, when with the strap over his shoulder connecting the two burdens, he was limping around the corner.

Before the arrival of doctor rorus, for whom the major had sent, Mallard declared that he was able to recommence his journey. Ratke protested, but to no avail. He did, however, induce the senator to take the cars at Barton Junction and allow Daggett, whom he considered a fair horseman, to drive the team to Lansing.

CHAPTER XXII.

ACTION IS EQUAL TO REACTION.

THE dry weather continued. In the memory of the oldest inhabitant there had not been so long an interval without rain. Cattle and sheep sought the protection of shade. Stunted and withered, the corn leaves rolled upward to hold the scanty supply of dew which fell, but it was sucked away by the sun; and their need of drink was still unfurnished. In the road timothy and June grass were dried and lopped over. Other grass, withered before maturity, was laid flat and thickly powdered with sand, yellow along its blades, showing green near its roots, even through its veil of dirt. Clouds of dust were almost continually in motion, coming from the wheels of passing vehicles and from drags and cultivators at work on the moistureless summer fallows. The smell of burning marshes was in the air. Fire, started accidentally or thoughtlessly, was running here and there through the country, uniting with the drought to render unavailing the farmer's toil.

The effect of the fire and dust was to level distinctions of color in nature. Vegetation was draped in dirt; so that grass and tree, plowed field and meadow, all approached the same faded hue. The atmosphere seemed to share the general taint, as if the eye were constantly looking through a dust-smeared glass. Over and among the woods hung a haze of smoke, a connecting shade between cerulean and green, which made less marked the division where the tree-tops cut an irregular border in the sky.

Northern Michigan had been blazing. Thousands of families were homeless. For these sufferers subscriptions had been raised to which the people had liberally contributed. Then a great smoke arose from Oakville; and when it cleared, half the village had been consumed. Again the subscription was passed around, but this time it met with poorer success. A fortunate merchant who had escaped without loss visited Ratke as a solicitor for his fellow-townsmen. The major had just threshed a part of his wheat and had in his pocket forty dollars which he was to pay to the Enterprise Machine Company of Chicago. The note was due, and his impatient creditors had threatened him. "They can wait," he said. "Our neighbors cannot wait. Take it, Marsh, I wish I had more for you."

Montcalm had announced his intention to quit farm labor. It was with reluctance that his employer saw him take the train at Barton Junction.

July twenty-third was long a day of anticipation to Ratke. On that day he must deed away in Sharptown the Barton hundred and sixty in order to satisfy Durgenson, who, he feared, would drive him from his old farm. On that day he was to meet in the same town a man who with a view to purchasing would examine the New Jerusalem. As was related in the preceding chapter, an account of the invention had been published in the Indianapolis Standard," and shortly after a letter had come to the major from Madgeburg, Indiana, stating that a representative of the wagon-works in that city would be in Sharptown the twenty-third, and that, if Major Ratke would meet him at the Cass House, they might negotiate a sale. The letter was signed J. Boutwell, president. On the note-head was printed J. Boutwell, President; T. C. Parker, Treasurer.

"Fortune is with me, Maria," said the philosopher. "The Madgeburg wagon works are among the largest in the country. If they believe the New Jerusalem is a success, fifty thousand dollars is no price for it. Its value once proven, it will take everything by storm. I would rather have a percentage on the sales than to sell for cash."

"Well, that man is a fool," remarked Mrs. Grippin. "That's all I've got to say about him. He isn't fit to be president of any wagon company."

The major ordered Daggett to harness Taylor and Bill to the New Jerusalem. With approbation he looked over its low boxes and its high posts and wheels. He had taken it from the shop still unpainted because it would not have time to dry before it went to Sharptown for examination.

Seated in the bottom of the front box, he drove out of his yard with his head not five feet from the ground. Behind him was the second box, which was empty. On either side of each six-foot wheel and towering still a foot higher, was a post connected by a board with its mate at the top. The wheels had been favored with limited provisions for greasing; and one of them emitted at every revolution three squeaks, the first two short and spirited, the last dolorous and prolonged.

The major's neighbors did not gratify him by manifesting surprise. But, as he drove into Break o' Day, he and his conveyance created something of a sensation. Some of the citizens came out and delighted him by making minute inquiries. The boys were especially pleased with the novel exhibition. As the wagon started, several of them imitated the three squeaks of the noisy hind wheel with tolerable accuracy. But their companions, remembering the peanuts and candy which the kind-hearted philosopher had given them, obliged them to desist from the annoyance.

The ride from Break o' Day to Sharptown was one of victorious pomp, and the New Jerusalem a triumphal car. All along the route the squeaking hind wheel summoned hosts of spectators. There was no boy who did not suspend his play, no woman whose face was not pressed close to a window or thrust through a door, no man who did not pause in his work and follow the wonderful sight with his eye until it had receded far up the road, taking with it, after it had passed from view, its wailing squeak. Through the windows of one school-house appeared the upstretched heads of the pupils, and the teacher, although disapproving of their conduct, was careful to stand where she could hear her class without taking her gaze from the old man who was huddled in a low box half-hidden by posts and wheels. At the next school-house the pupils were having recess. He invited them to ride; and two of the boys, unheeding the bell, went with him for a mile. The driver on the power of a threshing-machine near the road yelled vociferously at his horses until they stopped. The gang of hands left their places to examine the new wonder. The major obtained an oil can from the driver and endeavored to grease the wheels of his wagon, but the closely fitting posts would not allow him properly to apply the oil.

No interest which he had aroused was worthy of comparison with that which he awakened in Sharptown. The central portion of the town, which contained two thousand inhabitants, was situated on the crest of a gradual slope. When Ratke entered the outskirts, several pedestrians were walking along the one side of the street which had a sidewalk. This number received additions from the houses and from the cross-streets. Farther on there was a walk on either side, and the throng divided and increased. Numbers from upper town observing the slow-moving procession, met and turning, joined the tide which, made up of footmen, horses and vehicles, filled the sidewalks and the street and confined travel to one direction.

A philosophic Scipio, the major leaned back in his car and viewed the homage which the gaping multitude unwittingly tendered him. He remembered that Scipio had fallen from appreciation, and he preferred, therefore, to compare himself to Cæsar. Before him was a common wagon loaded with wheat. Anciently the conquered foe walked before the conqueror. " Likewise," thought Ratke, "the common wagon goes before the New Jerusalem, which is destined soon to sweep it completely out of use."

The greatest incongruity in his position was that he was very low for a conquering hero. The horses obscured his vision, and he was obliged to twist his head to one side in order to see his wagon's vanquished rival jolting along through the dust, unconscious of its doom.

When the proud inventor stopped on Main Street, the most prominent merchants came out to meet him. There, surrounded by the wondering population, he explained the principles of his invention, its lightness of draught, its adaptation to the farm and to the city. Many of the best men of Sharptown, carried away by his eloquence, became admirers of the singular vehicle. Before the spectators had asked half the questions which they wished to propound, he drove to the Cass House, thinking it advisible to leave their curiosity but partly appeased.

The hotel which had been appointed as the place of meeting, was the most pretentious in the town. The major was conducted to a room where he found the president of the Madgeburg wagon works. Mr. Boutwell was a very good-looking man with a business-like air, which was sustained by his manner, words and clothes. Ratke would have liked him better had he shown more of the agent's flattery and less of the buyer's independence. Still, he was equally independent in the negotiation, and he was willing to take the manufacturer's money, even though it was brusquely tendered.

"I'm glad you've come," said Mr. Boutwell. "My nephew got hold of an Indianapolis 'Standard' and read the account of your wagon. We may not make a deal, probably sha'n't, but I'm willing to look at it. Where is it?"

"Out by the barn," answered the major. "You can see it from that window."

"I wish there wasn't such a crowd around it," remarked Mr. Boutwell. "We can't do anything looking at it now. We shall have to wait till they go away."

"I was anxious to finish the negotiation at once," said the major. "I must raise some money, and unless I sell the wagon, I must dispose of a piece of land. That is why I am anxious to come to a conclusion immediately."

"Oh, we can't make a deal to-day," said Mr. Boutwell. "Not under two weeks anyway. I must go to the company and report. If I think it is worth while, we'll take the wagon down to Madgeburg to look at it. Then if we all think it's an improvement, we'll give you a fair price for it."

"Then," said the major sadly, "I must sell the farm. My business is such that I cannot wait."

The Barton hundred and sixty was a fertile piece of land and had excellent buildings. A grasping farmer was ready to buy it for his son who was soon to be married, but knowing Ratke's circumstances, he would offer but thirty dollars an acre, little more than half its value. The cashier of the Second National Bank handed out a number of bills, which Ratke put into a bag. The bag was light, but the heart of the major was heavy.

The afternoon was well spent when Ratke returned to the Cass House. The New Jerusalem, waxing old as an object of wonder, was nearly deserted by the crowd.

As their acquaintance was prolonged, Mr. Boutwell became more talkative, or rather more agreeable, for he had been at first not unwilling to talk.

"How do you like philosophy?" inquired the major.

"Very well," answered Mr. Boutwell. "I used to have a special liking for it."

"What author is your favorite?" asked Ratke.

"Oh, I like Comstock," said Mr. Boutwell. "I think he's about as good as any of them."

"Comstock," said the major in disgust, "he is the author of an elementary physics."

"There are different tastes about authorities," observed Mr. Boutwell. "Some may not like Comstock. I think he does pretty well."

"How do you like Hobbes?"

"First-rate," ventured Mr. Boutwell, thinking that he now heard the name of the major's favorite. "I like him very much."

"I do not. His theories are the most selfish ever put forth by a philosopher. What do you think of his work, the Leviathan?"

"If I remember rightly," said Boutwell, "it has a fine description of the whale."

The major concluded that Mr. Boutwell had given his entire energies to business. "I hope you are not a disciple of Hobbes," he remarked. "If you are, you will beat me down as much as you can on the price of my wagon. In that case, I can expect an offer from you of not more than five hundred."

"Oh, no," said Boutwell, "not by any means. What I meant was that he could write pretty well. Now, am I right? Isn't his work in good style?"

"A good style of its class," answered Ratke. "He attempts no excellence except in ratiocination."

"It's a good while since I've looked up these matters," said Mr. Boutwell, "and as for ratiocination, that's away beyond my depth. I can oversee the making of wagons and find sales for them, but I'm a poor hand to ratiocinate. It's six o'clock. We'll take some supper now. I'll have it brought up here, and then we can talk by ourselves."

Ratke did not decline the manufacturer's invitation. They ate slowly, and lingered about the table after their appetites were satisfied.

"I wish we could look at that wagon without having some one else hanging around," said Mr. Boutwell. "We can't test it with everybody in the way."

"Come up to my place," said the major. "We can have a good chance there. We can test it in every way you wish."

"I don't know but I'll have to," acquiesced Mr. Boutwell. "They're not as thick as they were down there. New ones seem to be coming up all the time, though. I'll write a letter to Madgeburg before I go."

Ratke waited for the president of the wagon works to write his letter. He had not then purchased one of the articles for which Mrs. Grippin had sent. The sun was down when he had performed his many errands. At twilight he and Mr. Boutwell descended to the wagon, to which the hostler had hitched his team.

"You will admit," said the major, "that the invention is original."

"Yes," responded Mr. Boutwell, "nobody will dispute that. But what is the matter with the boxes?"

On the front box had been chalked a death's-head, a mule and various other designs. On the rear one had been pasted some enormous show-posters and some small bills.

"The man that done that ought to be prosecuted," remarked the manufacturer.

"Oh, no," said the major, apparently not in the least out of humor. "It was, quite likely, done by boys. They meant no harm and did little. The posters can be washed off, and as for the chalk marks, they will not show when they are covered with paint."

"I am afraid," said Mr. Boutwell, when they had started on the angling road leading from Main Street to Break o' Day, "that the wagon will bother about hauling poles."

"There is not the least trouble about that," assured the inventor. "You can take out all the end boards and put the poles, the forward parts in the forward box, the rear parts in the rear box. Of course, there is a small portion of the weight which has no support underneath, but not enough to cause a dangerous transverse strain. The intensity of stress on the wagon, too, is inconsiderable. It is, in terms of acceleration, force divided by area, M L divided by T square, divided by L square, or M divided by L T square. L and T, you observe, in this case are very large in proportion to M. And the poles can be so conveniently loaded. You have to raise them no higher than you do when you are carrying them. How many ruptures and strains would be saved if men could load wheat into this wagon. After we get home, we will haul poles until you are satisfied."

"The high posts are one objection," said Mr. Boutwell. "They look bad, and I can't think of anything they're good for."

"I can think of several uses which they have," said Ratke. "They make good standards for a hay-rack. This morning Dr. Rorus observed that this would be the best wagon in the world for public occasions, such as the Fourth of July. Flags and banners could be attached to the posts, and they could be seen for a great distance."

"How about its draught?" asked Mr. Boutwell.

"That is its strong point," said Ratke. "The propelling force has a good chance to act. Its point of application is low.. And it lessens the pressure on the wheels. The six-foot wheel and the two-inch pivot, too, form another great advantage, as they materially lessen the friction. Every time a wheel revolves, one fourth the weight of the load scrapes over the circumference of its axle or pivot. In the New Jerusalem the wheel is six feet in diameter, and the pivot two inches. In the common wagon the wheel is, say five feet, and the axle three inches.

In the New Jerusalem the load is propelled seventy-two inches while the movement at the point of friction is two inches. In the common wagon the load is propelled sixty-inches, while the movement at the point of friction is three inches. In the New Jerusalem the ratio of frictional movement to the distance of transportation is thirty-six. In the common wagon it is twenty."

"Wouldn't it be a good plan to have a spindle turn on rollers?" asked Mr. Boutwell.

"I have thought of that," said the major. "That changes the loss of power at the spindle or pivot from sliding to rolling friction. But these small wheels must turn on spindles or pivots and engender the sliding friction they are calculated to prevent. Thus we exchange the sliding friction for both sliding and rolling friction."

"What will you take for that nigh horse?" asked Mr. Boutwell.

"Four thousand dollars," replied the major.

"He must be a good one," commented Mr. Boutwell.

"Fair," said Ratke, in a way which intimated that he was stating Taylor's merits with moderation.

"I have been talking some of getting me a horse," said Mr. Boutwell, "but that is more than I want to invest. Can't you start him up? I'd like to see him move off a little faster."

"Charge," said the major in a quiet tone.

The wagon started with such suddenness that the sleek manufacturer was jerked violently backward. His beaver fell and was run over by the hind wheel. The president of the wagon works clutched the side of the box and remonstrated with Ratke on his fast driving. "Oh, I wouldn't drive too fast, Major! It's a warm night."

"My team is good for it," responded Ratke.

"It ain't safe," said Mr. Boutwell, after a heavy jolt had thrown him to the opposite side of the box. "Something might break. Hold on, Major, I've lost my hat!"

"Halt," commanded the major. Instantly the team stopped, and Mr. Boutwell was pitched headlong against the dashboard.

"That's useless fast driving," he said. "It's unreasonable in hot weather." His face was sad as he returned with his once magnificent hat which, with its crown crushed in, was quite ruined.

The major, stopping at Birch & Bigney's store, purchased a hat for Mr. Boutwell, not, indeed, one so impressive as the demolished beaver had been, but the best which Break o' Day afforded. He was not sorry for the misfortune of his companion, who, intent on the transaction of their business, had taken no pains to make himself agreeable. He wished that the company had sent another man, whose criticism was less free.

"I don't like that squeaking," said Mr. Boutwell. "It looks to me as if there wasn't much of a chance to grease the wheels. Your machinist must be a poor workman."

"I can soon fix the wheels so we can grease them," said the major. "Now, as to the pivot, you think that it is very rough. You notice that the pitch of the squeak is high, on the key of C, I think. There must be, then, one thousand and fifty-six vibrations per second. The motion at the pivot, as I said, is slight. In order to have one thousand and fifty-six vibrations of sound result from a slight motion the protuberances must be very small. What do you think you can pay me for my wagon?"

"I can't say now," answered Mr. Boutwell. "I don't know as we can buy it at all. If we take it, we'll give you a good price. But before we negotiate, we would want you to agree not to go to any other company till you've got through with us. If I think it worth while, I'll have you drive out to Madgeburg."

"You can ride with me," said Ratke.

"No," said Mr. Boutwell, "you go too fast and stop too quick for me. I must get back to attend to business. I'll take the cars."

"When you understand one principle you will be all right to ride with me," said Ratke. 'Action is equal to reaction, and in a contrary direction.' What you must guard against is reaction. It was reaction which pitched you against the dashboard. This law has application elsewhere than in the physical world. A man is persecuted by society. In time it is discovered that he has been a martyr, and he is lauded as much as he has been abused.

My New Jerusalem is now ridiculed. In a few years its praises will be in every man's mouth. 'Action is equal to reaction and in a contrary direction.'"

"Can you always make your horses stop as quick as you did back yonder?" asked Mr. Boutwell.

The major showed his ability to govern his team by again giving the order to stop. The president of the wagon works placed his hands on Ratke's shoulders and pulled him backward. Then he quickly put his knee astride his body and grasped his arms.

"I don't hardly believe I'll go home with you," said Mr. Boutwell with a grin. "I've got to get back to Madgeburg to oversee the wagon works. Now I'd like a little money to pay my fare with."

They were in the center of the swamp, the lights in the farm-houses had gone out, and interference was not likely to come. Ratke was not terrified by the unlooked-for assault. He did not struggle. Calmly and reproachfully he looked up in the face of the robber who had so basely betrayed his confidence.

"I want you to fork over that money," said Mr. Boutwell, "and don't be a great while about it. I'm not going to be fooled with."

Still the major did not answer.

"Are you going to give me that money?" demanded Boutwell.

"No," said Ratke.

"Then I'll make it uncomfortable for you!" exclaimed Boutwell.

"You can have my life," said the major, "and you will have to take it if you get my money."

"We won't ratiocinate now," said Mr. Boutwell. "You're great on sliding friction and rolling friction. Now slide or roll out that money, or there'll be a friction you don't like!"

Boutwell's hand reached quickly towards a side pocket, but it was grasped by Ratke, when, with his left, he struck the old man a heavy blow under the eye. With the blood trickling down his cheek Ratke strove to rise.

"Now," said Boutwell, "you stop kicking around and do as I tell you or I'll shoot you through the heart! Be in a hurry, too. We ain't talking wagon now. Come now, no Hobbes nor transverse strain."

"Charge!" shouted the major. At that magic word the wheels of the New Jerusalem raised clear from the ground, and the three squeaks blended in one, which was shrill, continuous and ear-splitting. Mr. Boutwell was pitched against the rear end-board, but he regained his equilibrium and again struck Ratke. He was in a fair way to administer a terrible punishment to the philosopher when a great jolt threw him off his balance; and before he recovered himself, the old man, whose strength he had under-estimated, rolled him and began to rain blows upon his face. Ratke's fighting blood was up, and he plied his fists with such vigor that Mr. Boutwell soon cried, "Hold up! Hold up! I'll quit. I've got enough."

"I am sorry," said the major, "that I have been obliged to strike a man who was down. I trust you will pardon me. And now you have seen a demonstration of the theorem which I stated. 'Action is equal to reaction and in a contrary direction.' Halt."

The team stopped at the edge of the tamaracks. The New Jerusalem was now a veritable chariot, for it had been uncoupled by the jolt which had demoralized Boutwell, and the hind wheels were far back on the causeway. A thick cloud of dust hovered over the road along which they had sped.

"I will send one of my men down after it to-morrow," said Ratke. "We will go on without it now. You can get up, Mr. Boutwell. Allow me to search your pockets."

Ratke, after taking two revolvers from the pockets of his new acquaintance, drove on in silence. At the large gate by the house he stopped and called, "Mark, Mark, come and take care of the team."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE HOUR OF BLISS.

By Mrs. Boyle's clock it lacked twenty-two minutes of midnight. It was the hour for sleep and repose, yet it was an hour of activity. The hornets were buzzing in their hidden nests, the millers were flitting about the lamp. The two human occupants of the house were excited. One had been brutally attacked; and the other had come to her assistance too late, or, perhaps, providentially late.

"You say he is not my son," said Mrs. Boyle. "You talk as if you knew, John."

He noticed with pleasure that she called him John. "So I do know," he replied. "A dull man ought to be able to tell that. When I am convinced that the loftiest virtue begets the grossest vice, I will believe that you are his mother."

"No," she said, "he is not my son. None of the neighbors know it, and he don't know it. I'm sure you won't tell anything I don't want you to."

"No," said John earnestly, "I never will."

"Then, if you're not sleepy," said Mrs. Boyle, "I will tell you the whole story. When Mr. Boyle was alive, we stayed several years in Chicago. We lived just a little ways from Alfred's folks. I guess I won't tell even you his real name. His father and mother were bad characters. They both drank and stole. They would quarrel and sometimes fight. Once in a while he pounded her terribly. Little Alfred would scream as loud as he could. He wasn't big enough to talk much. Then, if Mr. Boyle was at home, he would go over to see about it. The last time he went Alfred's father and mother both told him to go home and never come there again. They could manage their own affairs. Finally he pounded her so that he was arrested and sent to jail. It wasn't long after that she stole some valuable jewelry out of a store.

"I was in court when they sentenced her. She might have got off easier but she was sullen, just like Alfred, and she prejudiced them against her. She was sent to the penitentiary for a year. It was hard to see that little fellow hanging to her hand, and to think what a training he would get. I told her if she would give him to me, I would take him. She seemed to be glad to get him off her hands, and she said she hadn't any objections."

Mrs. Boyle gave John an account of her and her protégé since Mr. Boyle's death, of their removal to Michigan, of Alf's growing depravity, which he manifested even in his early childhood.

"He is naturally bad," said John. "You might as well try to turn a bramble to a peach tree as to attempt to make a respectable man of him."

"I know he has got into some awful trouble," said Mrs. Boyle. "I don't expect him back very soon. But if he comes, you must stay above, no matter how he acts."

"You want me to be less than a man," replied John. "You think I would stay up there and let him strike you. If he attempts any such thing again, I will come sooner than I did before."

"Then he certainly will kill you," said Mrs. Boyle. "You don't know him. He has a passion for killing things. Whenever he can, he takes the life of a chipmunk, or a toad, or a fly, or anything, no matter what it is."

John remembered the millers, the bat and the squirrel; and he knew that Mrs. Boyle's estimate of the ruffian's character was correct.

"Now, do as I tell you, John," she continued. "You seem almost like my own boy. You won't get mad if I call you John, will you?"

"No," said John, "I wish I were your son."

He thought long of her words. Until then, motherless, not quite friendless, he had yearned for that sympathy which, coming only from the maternal heart, cures wounds of the spirit and body and makes suffering almost desirable, that the joy of healing may be experienced. Instinct had told him that he needed it. Other boys had been petted and caressed while he had been kicked and cursed. Now, when boyhood was passed, he had found a foster-mother who was kinder than his natural parent, whose touch was balm for bodily pain, whose presence banished despondency, whose words were gentle in consolation and in reproof. He would have laid down his life for her and rejoiced in the sacrifice. Could he have been her son, even if disgrace had still clung to him, how much of misery would he have escaped.

The sun was again peeping over the tall trees when two men walked across the clearing and inquired for Alfred Boyle. After satisfying themselves by inquiries that he was not in the house, and informing Mrs. Boyle that he was wanted for a robbery at Birch & Bigney's store, they passed on.

" You can come down, John," said Mrs. Boyle, stopping under the entrance to the loft. " Alfred won't be back in a good while."

John's leg made rapid progress toward recovery. With Mrs. Boyle's permission, for he was generally scrupulous in yielding to her wishes, he walked about the small clearing on his crutches.

The excitement over his adventure had materially subsided, or had given place to that over the recent robbery. It was whispered here and there that possibly the real thief had not been accused, and it was universally admitted that the mob had acted with more haste than justice. Still, John did not care to have his whereabouts known. Such a knowledge would lead to his arrest, when he would be asked to furnish some explanations which he could not satisfactorily give. And yet, menaced by these consequences, he took risks. Without the knowledge of Mrs. Boyle he wandered to the narrow strip of improved land which lay between the woods and the swamp. He must get where he could see beyond the small pen in which he was imprisoned by the forest, and he must not show contempt of her orders. Each day he sat for an hour at the foot of a large tree, scanning the continuous strip of timber. The long field was the one which with its great brittle lumps of sand he had passed a short time previous to his accidental meeting with the Wallaces. The high oaks on the opposite side hid the waters of Coon Lake and the village of Break o' Day.

Beyond the high belt of wood was one for a sight of whom he would have ventured much. That misgiving which he had felt at their parting, that impulse which in the face of resistance had urged him to bid a second adieu were not vain follies, but the warnings of, and, had he heeded them, the preparation for an occurrence the end of which he could not foretell. He speculated as to the probable location of Ratke's house. He believed that with the aid of his mathematics he could determine it with a fair degree of accuracy. After some deliberation he fixed upon a depression in the upper edge of the woods, as the place which had been hollowed out by nature that his gaze might more nearly approach the Gothic house with its shroud of evergreens and its greater attraction within. His hand impulsively went to his lips and threw a greeting toward the imaginary gateway. To verify his mathematical observations he obtained Mrs. Boyle's compass. What was the reaction when he discovered that he had mistaken north for northwest and that he had thrown his kiss in the direction of Julia Wallace! Rectifying his mistake, he decided that the dry top of a lofty tamarack which stood where the skirt of the hard-wood timber ended was between him and Manie. His breast heaved, but it soon harbored that discontent which had been engendered by his early training. Chances for which some vainly long are given. to others who have for them not the slightest appreciation. The dry old tree-top cared not for youth and beauty. Stripped of its foliage to mitigate the force of the wind and groaning whenever an unusual gust strained its rheumatic seams, it might look down on Ratke's, might see a graceful form and composed, dignified face emerging from the evergreens, yet it ignored its privileges, while they were yearned for by another.

One night John announced to Mrs. Boyle his intention to take his departure from her house.

"I hate to have you go," she said, "you step as if your ankle was nearly well, but you know it is weak yet. You are welcome to stay, and I'd like to have you. It will be lonesome when you are gone. Aren't you afraid they'll try to arrest you?"

"I shall go to Barton Junction," said John, "and I have no acquaintances there. So many crimes have been committed in this section lately that strangers will not be on the lookout to apprehend me."

"You are not going to-night?" asked Mrs. Boyle, as John took his hat.

"Not to the Junction," said John, as he arose. "But I may not be back until late."

"Now, John," said Mrs. Boyle, laying her hand on his arm, "be careful. Don't expose yourself too much. Don't go to Break o' Day, or any place where there are drunken men. You don't know what they would do."

"I will do as you say," answered John, as he stepped outside.

He crossed the clearing, on the poorly-cultivated surface of which fire-weeds had grown rank and thick. As they were disturbed, clouds of down floated from them and emitted an acrid odor which suggested the appropriateness of their name. Wrengell took the road which he had lost in his first approach to the lonely house in the clearing. The plentiful light streaming from the heavens showed the nightly magnificence of the wood. A furlong from the edge the underbrush was scant, so that the large trunks were visible for rods. Slender plats of fresh green grass were scattered at intervals, their loveliness more apparent because contrasted with the brown spread of dry leaves. Their verdancy had been preserved in the cool shade furnished by the great white oaks, whose strong arms were outstretched to shelter them from the heat of midday.

McDuff's heavy gate with the stone balance swung open as easily as it had done two weeks before. Not wishing to follow the road, John crossed it and clambered over the opposite fence. He deemed it advisable to proceed along the edge of the swamp, where, should he be observed, he could find a refuge at once. A bright fire, evidently from a high brush heap, was burning at the border of the woods beyond the wide stretch of fields. That he was nearing familiar territory he was apprised by a sound which he had once detested, but which was now far from unwelcome, the yelping of Takum's dogs. He crossed a second road and was shortly in the major's field, for the leveling of which the hands had worked so long in the spring.

He stood a minute by the front gate. The loud talking of the men had ceased in the club-house. It was past the hour when the major's family was in the habit of retiring, yet a light was burning in the parlor. John stole to a window and looked inside. Not a person was in sight. This was inexplicable to him, as it was Ratke's custom to put out the lights before going to bed. He was astonished when, taking a closer view, he saw Archer yawning over a thick octavo volume, the pages of which he occasionally turned. His fellow hired man had not been famed for his love of books, and he wondered that he should suddenly become so devoted a student as to read until midnight. He could account for his presence there at that hour, only on the supposition that one of the household was sick and that he was serving as watcher. While he was endeavoring to solve the riddle, Mrs. Grippin appeared, blew out the light, gave some injunctions which he could not distinguish, and retired. Making a reconnoissance of the house, John discovered that lights were burning in two of the back bedrooms, which were separated by a distance of a few feet. Curtains were before the windows, and on one of them was impressed the shadow of a human form. For some minutes he watched it, undecided whether it were made by Nora or by Manie. At last the figure quickly jerked its head, disappeared for an instant and returned. It did not belong to Manie, it was that of her impulsive cousin.

With a throbbing heart he went cautiously to another window. Drawing a long breath, he raised his finger hesitatingly. It trembled an instant in the air and fell several times faintly on the pane. There was a rustling of paper within, a sound as of some one closing a book and moving about in a chair. He was tempted to draw back from his adventure. Admitting that he had rightly guessed the location of Manie's room, how was he assured that she would welcome a communication at midnight, or that she might not be affrighted and raise an alarm. She had quitted the chair. She was about to take some action, either to respond to his signal, or to tell the household that some one was prowling near the room. If he would prevent her from raising an outcry, he must speak without delay. He must see her. He must say the farewell which he had once repressed. He placed his lips almost to the glass and whispered, "Manie. Manie. Miss Ratke," he corrected, alarmed at his familiarity. The curtains parted, and the face of Manie appeared, not affrighted, but lacking its usual serenity. She started as she saw a man close enough to touch her had he broken that barrier of glass.

"Do not be alarmed," said John. "It is I, John, John Wrengell."

"Is it you?" asked Manie. John thought that there was something of joy in her manner. "We were afraid you were dead," she continued. "We had not heard from you in so long."

"Can you not get on your bonnet and come out?" said John. "I am afraid we shall be overheard."

"Come to-morrow," said Manie, "and we will all be glad to see you."

"I cannot," responded John sadly. "I am afraid I never can come again. I am going away to-morrow morning, and I would like to talk with you a few minutes."

His hope of having his request granted was so slight that he was surprised when she put on a straw hat and began to raise the window. He assisted her to the ground, and they stood together outside.

"Let us go to the orchard," he said.

It was there that she had accepted the first offer of his company. He wished, but he doubted, that his words would be as well received as they were on that Sabbath morning when the blossoms were fluttering from the agitated boughs. At the foot of a harvest tree Manie stooped to pick up an apple. She was not hungry, and she had no definite purpose in so doing; but John, supposing that she wished to satisfy her appetite, sprang up the tree in search of its best products. Like a red squirrel he raced from limb to limb and soon descended, bringing a pocketful of mellow apples, which he insisted that she should take.

Now that he was in her presence, he was at a loss what to do or what to say. He could not bear to go away without taking her hand and bidding her an informal farewell which, if they were destined to meet no more, would ever be a delightful memory. He dreaded to follow his inclinations, lest he should be repulsed and their parting be an event which would bring the most miserable recollections. He began to feel that their meeting was a disappointment, that in social position and in mutual regard they were and must of necessity be far apart.

"I must go in," said Manie.

"Oh, not yet! Please do not go yet!" John remonstrated. "We have just begun to talk."

"I have stayed a great while now," said Manie. "If people knew it, what would they say of my climbing from a window to meet you at night?"

"They will not know it," said John, "and there is no hurt in it, I am sure. I own it does not reflect credit on you to be seen with me. I am poor and disgraced. I do not wish to drag you down to my level. To-morrow morning I go away, and I shall not come back. Keep from me in the future, but to-night bid me good-bye as you would an equal."

"And where will you go?" asked Manie.

"Of that I am uncertain," said John. "I mean to escape from my evil destiny. It has followed me like a hound all my life. But I will struggle with it to the end. If I am overcome, it will be when I have strength to fight no longer. I mean yet to make a man whom the world will and must respect. I will take no rest, I will work in season and out of season; and if I fail, it will not be my fault."

"I believe you will succeed," said Manie. "You certainly deserve to."

"Do you think so?" said John, excited so much that his articulation was indistinct. "By God's help I will succeed! Manie, Miss Ratke, I will go and try. If I fail, I will stay away as long as I live. But if I succeed, if the world by its recognition acknowledges the wrong it has done me, may I come back, come back with hope in my heart, and ask you to be my wife ?"

"I can consent to no such proposal," said Manie.

"I do not blame you," said John dejectedly. "I make an unreasonable request."

"You wrong me," said Manie.

"Yes," assented John, "I was foolish to speak as I did. You have a right to resent such an offer from one in my position."

"I care nothing for your position," said Manie. "But your offer implies that I am selfish. It accuses me of wishing to share your fortune, but escape your misfortune. If I would have you at all, I would have you whether you were rich or poor, successful or unsuccessful, esteemed or despised."

Again John felt the buoyancy of hope. She was near him, she, who, when he was menaced by danger and tortured with pain, had with hardly an interruption occupied his thoughts for a fortnight. His arm stole about her.

"Do not drive me away just yet," he pleaded. "Repulse me if you will, but after I have done speaking. Manie, I must call you that name once, I did wrong you. But now I ask you, shall we not go together in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and in adversity, in riches and in poverty, in fame and in disgrace, as long as we live ? It is a great sacrifice which I ask of you. Do not answer me yet. Let me be in suspense. Let me think for a moment that I have won you, that we need not again be separated."

She did not reply, and his grasp involuntarily tightened. There was inspiration to John in every sight and sound, in every message communicated by the senses. The wind gently touched his brow.

Every orb in the sky was sending down its quota of light. The house showed its roof and eaves above the trees, as if it had been dropped and had sunk in its soft cushion of green. The branches of the apple tree, swaying slightly, cast at their feet silver bars and meshes of bright net-work. The steady singing of the cricket, blending with the sharp jerking chirrup of the katydid, closed his eyes and plunged him into a reverie, which was brief, delightful, and ever after unfogotten.

"I am ready for your answer," said John. "Sentence me as you will."

"Yes," said Manie.

Her reply destroyed the last vestige of his composure. He threw his other arm frantically about her and kissed her again and again.

"Stop, stop!" said Manie. "One arm in that posture is enough. I shall have to go in now."

They said nothing as they walked to the house. John opened the window and lifted her carefully through.

"Give me a good-night kiss," he said. "I do not like to take leave of you as formally as I did the last time I was in the house."

"I hope you are satisfied now," she said, after his demand had been granted.

He was about to take another salute without permission, when Manie, anticipating his design, quickly withdrew her head and closed the window.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BEETHOVEN AND A GIBBON IN ONE.

"HELLOA!" exclaimed Daggett, as he approached the gate, "where's the hind wheels?"

"The road was rough, and the wagon uncoupled," said the major. "They are on the causeway, but you need not mind them till morning. Perhaps you had better have Will take care of the team. I shall want you to do an errand for me in the course of an hour."

Daggett cast some curious looks at Mr. Boutwell as he opened the gate and led the team through it.

"Whatever is the matter with you, James Ratke?" ejaculated Mrs. Grippin, when her brother and his unwilling vistor stood before her. "You've been fighting. That's just the way you used to look when you was a boy and got into rows. I'd be ashamed, an old man like you."

"Mr. Boutwell, my sister," said the major, ignoring Mrs. Grippin's tirade. "Come this way, Mr. Boutwell, and we will wash."

Ratke treated the spurious wagon manufacturer with the utmost deference. He kept an eye on his movements, however, and Mr. Boutwell understood that though he might expect the treatment of a king, it would be that of a captive king. He got him water to wash and insisted that his wounds be dressed before his own. Mr. Boutwell, whose experience with the philosopher had taught him better than to refuse his courtesies, was the picture of humiliation, as Ratke clumsily adjusted plasters over his split upper lip and a contusion on his cheek. Mrs. Grippin, unable longer to absent herself, entered the kitchen, where she was followed by the girls, who had arisen to ascertain what had befallen their uncle. The major in his most polite manner introduced Mr. Boutwell to the young ladies.

"So you've been fighting, Uncle James," said Nora. "Who did you have a fight with?"

"I cannot explain it to you now, little girl," said the major.

"You will, won't you, Mr. Boutwell?" said Nora. "Oh, you got into it, too, did you? You and Uncle James must have been together against a lot of 'em. Uncle James always sticks by his friends. Didn't he stick by you?"

"Close enough," answered Mr. Boutwell with a grin.

"You are badly hurt, Uncle James," said Manie. "Your eye is swollen, almost shut, and the cut under it does not stop bleeding yet."

"It is nothing," said Ratke, "a little scratch. It takes a worse wound than that to affect me."

Manie put a plaster over the bruised part. One of the major's eyes looked sleepy, and Mr. Boutwell's face was spotted with contusions and plasters.

"This way now, Mr. Boutwell," said the major, leading the way to the parlor, "make yourself comfortable while I do some writing."

"Manie," he called, when he had finished a short note, "tell Mark to take this to Jim Turner. And now, Mr. Boutwell," he said, "we will go."

"I wonder where in the world they've gone to at this time of the night," said Mrs. Grippin, as the sound of their footsteps was dying away. "Some notion James has got, I suppose."

"Who do you think they had a fight with?" asked Nora.

"How do you suppose I know any more than you do?" sharply returned Mrs. Grippin. "James ought to have more care for his reputation than to get into such a scrape. And the president of a big wagon company surely could find better business than fighting."

"Maybe they stopped to Break o' Day, and somebody pitched into 'em," suggested Nora.

"More likely somebody made fun of James' wagon, and he got mad," said Mrs. Grippin. "That'll touch him up the quickest of anything."

The major returned late, and Mr. Boutwell was not with him. He refused to give any information concerning his visitor, except that he had gone and would not again come back. The next morning, waxing more communicative, he yielded to Mrs. Grippin's influence, and admitted that Mr. Boutwell had attempted to rob him.

"That's the way your speculation turned out," commented Mrs. Grippin. "You might know he didn't mean it when he said he was coming to buy your wagon. He ain't such a fool as I thought he was."

"He is no fool," said Ratke. "He wished to obtain my money. He estimated properly the force at his disposal, but he fell into the common error of miscalculating the amount of resistance. I must have Mark hitch up Taylor. I shall have to go to Jackson to-day."

"Why, to-day is the day Durgenson is coming," said Mrs. Grippin.

"He wrote me that he cannot be here until to-morrow, said Ratke.

"Now," cautioned the housekeeper, "don't you take that money with you, James. It's the safest here."

"I had rather risk it with me," said the major. "I am able to defend it."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Grippin. "Such a careless man! You'll fall in with a sleek fellow that wants to buy your wagon, or some other knave; and, the first thing you know, it will be gone. Now, James," she said with more moderation, "where did you get that money?"

"Maria," answered the major, "I got it from the Barton hundred and sixty. I have sold it."

Without a word Mrs. Grippin turned and went to the parlor. Their last foot of land had been sold. She knew not when the order would come to leave the homestead and go into the street. They might find a home, but what kind of home? Nora would go to her aristocratic relatives. Manie might die or get married. She pictured mentally the two who formed the relic of the family, Ratke grubbing by the day, herself doing washing for Sparks and Mrs. Green. She was not ashamed to work; but she was ashamed to know and to have the world know that their property had been recklessly parted with, to slave for others in their old age, and finally to be dependent on local charity or go to the poor-house.

The major came home at dusk. "Well, Maria," he said, "I have escaped without meeting any bad fortune."

"You want to look out for to-night," cautioned his sister. "Everybody knows that money is here. You must watch it to-night."

"I am too tired to sit up," Ratke objected. "I was up all last night. It will be all right under my head."

"No, it won't," said Mrs. Grippin. "You've got to get some one to watch it, then."

"I hardly know whom to get," said the major. "All the men up west have been to Oakville, looking after the fire. Perhaps Philetus would come."

"Phleet," cried Mrs. Grippin wrathfully, "Phleet Takum! Haven't you got any more judgment than that? You know he takes whatever he can lay his hands on!"

"I suppose I might hire Abner Wallace," suggested Ratke.

"I declare!" ejaculated Mrs. Grippin, after a moment of speechlessness. "Pick out a thief to watch money! James, you are a bright one! Get one of your men."

"I hate to ask them to do such things when they work hard," said the major. "Mark is always willing to do odd chores, but he did not go to bed till late last night. I will see what I can do with them."

As the major went up the club-house steps, there was a scrambling among the inmates. He opened the door too late to see what had occasioned the confusion. The table was covered with a newspaper, which was raised at one corner enough to show several cards. But he did not notice the evidence of immorality.

"Will," he said, "Maria will give me no peace until I get a man to stay in the house to-night. She thinks we are liable to be robbed. I have not the slightest fear of such a danger, but to keep peace in the family I must do as she wishes. Can you come?"

"I've been to work awful hard to-day," said Archer. "That's tough ploughing, you know. It's all I can do to keep the plough in the ground. I could get along with it, but I'm all drilled out."

"I know it is hard work," said Ratke. "But Mark was up last night, and I cannot ask him to go."

"I'll go, Major," said Daggett.

"No," said the major, "I will not let you. You have lost sleep enough."

"I wouldn't care so much about it," said Archer, "if it wasn't for to-morrow. But this working as tight as you can jump and then being up all night, and then keeping right on the next day, it's too much."

"Oh, as to that," said Ratke, "you can sleep twenty-four hours, commencing at six o'clock, if you wish."

"Seeing it's an emergency, I'll go," said Archer. "Of course, I'm willing to make some sacrifice, Major."

"You need not come until ten o'clock unless you wish," said the major, opening the door to depart. "We will sit up as late as that."

"He wanted you," said Daggett, "and he didn't seem to want anybody else. I wonder why that was."

"Well," said Archer, "he knows what I am. I've worked for him a good while."

"Say," said Daggett, "if you get into a snooze, and a horse-thief goes to jabbing you with a fish-pole, you want to holler."

Archer, not relishing the reminiscences of his watch in the swamp, went at once to the house.

Mrs. Grippin was in a passion over the major's choice of watchman. "Now, Will," she said, "I want you to have some gumption about you. Wake up once in your life."

"Yes," said Archer, "I'll tend right to it, Mrs. Grippin. The major knows he can trust me for that."

"I hope he is right," said Mrs. Grippin. "He and the girls are in the parlor."

The major explained his plan of guarding the money. There was no danger, he said, but seeing Archer was to watch, he should take every precaution against a robbery. He should extinguish the light, he should barricade every door leading to the room. Then with the money and a revolver he should get into a dark corner. The north-east was the best one.

"This reminds me of an incident which happened in

Wisconsin Territory," said Ratke, "when we were chasing Black Hawk. We had been marching all day, constantly expecting to come up with the Indians. At night we camped in the edge of a strip of woods. I was just thinking of what a fine sleep I should have when the sergeant told me I was on for picket duty. My watch commenced at one o'clock. They posted me at least seventy rods from the camp, a short distance from a creek. It was rather a dark night and as we looked for an assault, I did not fancy the position. Standing where the enemy can see you, but you cannot see him, is quite different from advancing toward a perceptible danger. I knew that if the Sacs and Foxes were prowling about, they had an excellent chance to get my scalp. Sounds as of something going cautiously over the leaves kept coming from some woods on the other side of the creek. Presently there was a disturbance in the water, a subdued splashing which I knew to be occasioned by the crossing of a man or of some animal. The grass, which was tall and thick, began to wave suspiciously, and to add to my uneasiness the waves were coming toward me. I was at a loss what to do. Staying there for a target with the certainty of being hit the first fire was not in the least agreeable. Abandoning the post and giving an unnecessary alarm was to be avoided if possible. I got under cover of a tree, held my rifle ready to use, and waited. I could see a distinct advancing motion of the grass. I own I was nervous as I fired. I was still more so, when the steady motion changed to a spasmodic struggling and some objects which I could not see retreated. I had now no doubt as to the proximity of the Indians, but I did not think it my duty to go to the spot where I had heard the struggling. I waited a few minutes and could plainly distinguish more splashing as if others were crossing the creek. In a few minutes I was certain that some figures were skulking along between me and the camp. The disturbance in the grass near the creek continued. The camp had been warned and I felt justifiable in abandoning my post. As I bore to the right, three or four shots from the direction of the skulkers made me give one mighty jump. I brought my rifle to my shoulder, fired and ran. When I got to camp, everybody was up ready for an attack. The first man I met was the orderly sergeant.

"'Why, Ratke,' said the sergeant when I came up, 'we thought they'd killed you. Did you shoot at them or did they shoot at you?'

"'Both,' I answered.

"'Well, that's queer,' said the sergeant. 'We heard only one shot.'

"'I should think it is queer,' I answered. 'I fired at them. Then they got between me and the camp and fired three or four shots at me and I fired back.'

"'Now I don't see how that is,' said the sergeant. 'We saw one of them moving off. We fired at him, and he fired back, and the ball just scraped Montcalm's side.'

"'What!' I said, 'was it you who came out there?' I understood it then. They had heard the shot I fired and had crept out, when we mutually mistook each other for Indians. In the morning I found near my post the body of the largest raccoon I ever saw. New guards are always fearful of an attack from the enemy. They forget that the same prudence which they have will keep the foe from hazarding a rash assault."

"Can't you sing something for us, Mr. Archer?" asked Nora, beginning to yawn.

"Oh, I guess not, Mrs. Warfle," answered Archer, in the manner which indifferent artists employ to induce more urging. "I guess I hadn't better."

"Oh, yes, now, Mr. Archer," pleaded Nora. "If you only knew how we like to hear you. Why, if I could sing like you can, I'd give almost anything."

"That's what a good many folks have said, but still I don't claim to be anything great," observed Archer modestly.

"How did you learn to sing so nice?" inquired Nora.

"Well," said Archer, "it's Nature does the most of it."

At this juncture the vain major, whose greatest intolerance was for the weakness which he shared, left the room, unwilling to see his own folly in so exaggerated a form.

"You can sing so strong," said Nora. "I've heard

Aunt Maria say she never knew any one with such a voice."

"Now, Nora," said Mrs. Grippin, suddenly making her appearance, "you've got to quit such nonsense for I won't have it! You shan't be mixing my name in."

Archer supposed that the housekeeper was displeased because she rightly suspected that he was making a deep impression on Nora. Loath to give up the exercise of his fascination, he exchanged sly glances with the young lady, to the great wrath of Mrs. Grippin, who determined to wait until the proper moment, and then, rising in her just indignation, to send Nora to bed. But as Nora caught the gleam of her eye, and Archer abandoned his winking and leering on finding that they were not returned, the Trebian ambush was never sprung. Mrs. Grippin finally returned to her room, saying, as she did so,

"Now, Nora, if I hear any more nonsense, you'll start to bed."

"Mr. Archer," said Nora, a few minutes after the departure of her stern relative, "did you ever read history much?"

"Yes," said Archer, "I've read it a good deal."

"Who do you think was the greatest man that ever lived?"

"Well, now, I can't say positive," said Archer with a wise nod, "but I kind o' think George Washington was, don't you?"

"No," said Nora, "I think Tammany Hall was. But they didn't treat him very well, though."

"That's a fact," said Archer, "they used him miserable."

"Who do you think was to blame?"

"Well, now, it's been a good while since I've read it and a fellow will forget, you know. What do you think?"

"I think Queen Elizabeth was. Let's see. What was it he said when he got on board the steamer that was to take him to Cape Colony? 'Farewell, O England, thou land of my birth.'"

"Yes, that was it," assented Archer.

"Oh, no. It wasn't either, come to think of it," said Nora. "Don't you remember?

"'Long have I served thee O, Queen,'
Long hath my love to thee been.

He was a poet, you know."

"That's so," said Archer. "I do remember now."

"What do you think of Moses the Great?"

"I think he was quite a man."

"I guess he was quite a man. He conquered the whole world, you know."

"Yes, I know it," said Archer, bobbing his head.

"Oh, no," exclaimed Nora, "not quite all when we think about it. There was Elisha the Seventh, of Russia, beat him at Waterloo."

"So he did," admitted Archer.

"How Moses the Great did run his horses to get away," pursued Nora, "full-blooded Hambletonians, too. They said they run awful."

"They claim they scratched gravel to beat all," said Archer.

"You can find pictures of all the great men in this history of the world," said Nora, bringing from one of the bookcases a large volume with morocco back and corners.

"I like to look at pictures, Mrs. Warfle," said Archer, taking the history.

"Let's see," said Nora, "they called Elisha the Seventh Giant Lishe, because he was such a great man to fight."

"I know they did," said Archer. "He was a tearer let loose."

"Isn't it time to go to bed?" asked Manie.

"No," answered Nora, "I'm not going to bed yet. Go on if you want to. I believe he was born in the year eight hundred and two. I think his greatest exploit was at the battle of Lundy's Lane, where he slew Olyppus the Tiger with his own hand. Let's see, was it one of his own officers that killed him?"

"I don't remember," said Archer. "I've had to work so hard lately that I ain't read much. But I was posted once."

"Oh, no," said Nora, "don't you remember? He was blown up by nitro-glycerine, blown to pieces so they couldn't find any of his body to bury?"

"That's so, Mrs. Warfle," assented Archer. "He was teetotally smashed."

The door suddenly opened and the staring visage of Mrs. Grippin was thrust inside.

"Nora," she exclaimed, "we've had enough Giant Lishe for to-night. Now you can poke straight to bed."

Manie immediately rose to leave, and Nora, knowing that it was useless for her to argue, prepared to obey her aunt's orders. She went to the bookcase and slipped under her apron a novel, which she intended to read in her room. Archer, left to himself, turned over the pages of the history to see if he could find the portraits of the heroes whose merits he had been reviewing. He found many military scenes and many pictures of warriors whose heads were adorned with smooth helmets or jagged crowns. But in his search he was not confronted by the battle-scarred face of Moses the Great or Giant Lishe.

Mrs. Grippin soon came back and ordered him to prepare for the night's vigil. She blew out the light, told him to get in the corner designated by the major and bade him a final good-night.

It chanced that the sofa was in that corner. Archer was tired. It occurred to him that he could watch as well reclining as erect. He laid the money on one end of the lounge, placed his coat on it and his head on the coat. The ticking of a small clock increased his drowsiness, and in five minutes he was asleep.

An hour later an intruder was in the room, carefully lifting Archer's head and removing the bag in his possession, when the eyes of the sleeper unclosed and Archer raised himself on his elbow. The robber dashed through the hall, running close to Nora, who was returning to the library with the book which she had taken. He entered the front bedroom and sprang through the open window, disappearing among the evergreens, just as Archer, who was now thoroughly awake, fired two shots after his retreating figure.

CHAPTER XXV.

DURGENSON DEMANDS HIS MONEY.

"OH, dear! Oh, dear!" wailed Nora, throwing herself on the floor. "What made you shoot? Oh, Mr. Archer! What made you shoot?"

"I hit him!" cried Archer. "I know I did! I'll bet a dollar I did!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" moaned Nora.

An instant later Ratke rushed to the scene of disturbance with his trousers in his hand.

"What is it?" he exclaimed. "Is the money safe?"

"It's gone!" said Archer. "He went out of that window, and I shot at him."

Like a school-boy the major jumped through the window and ran down the walk. When he came to the gate, he fancied he saw a man entering the shadow of the horse-barn. He proceeded to the spot, but save himself, no man was in sight. Near the straw-stack he drew on his trousers, which he had till then unthinkingly retained in his hand.

"Get up from that floor, Nora," commanded Mrs. Grippin.

"Oh, I can't," wailed Nora. "I never can get up. Oh, dear!"

"Come," said Mrs. Grippin, dragging her to her feet, "I won't have you act so. Nobody is hurt."

"I wouldn't be in that fellow's boots for money, any way," said Archer, tipping his head with an expression of superior wisdom. "If he ain't got some cold lead in him, he's a good one."

The men searched the barns and spread out over the adjacent fields. Realizing that a crisis in their employer's business affairs had come, they entered into the hunt with a zeal which they had never manifested for farm labor.

"It is of no use," said Ratke, as the morning drew near. "The robber and the money are beyond our reach. Go to the club-house and finish your sleep. I cannot give it up yet, even though there is no hope."

Not one of the men would accept his offer. Unanimously, they agreed to stand by their employer in his extremity, and to continue their efforts as long as there was hope. Daggett went to Break o' Day, roused a few of the inhabitants, and made such arrangements as he thought were likely to lead to the recovery of the major's stolen property. The remainder of the hands and Ratke were ranging about in the swamp when the ringing of the upright saw in the apple-tree summoned them to breakfast. While they were in the kitchen washing, Daggett returned.

The late misfortune filled the major with a dejection which nothing but the precipitation of his trouble and the destruction of his hopes could create. The Barton hundred and sixty had gone; the homestead must go. The study, the tool-house, the improvements which he had made, were to be his but a day. He told the men that they need not begin work that morning, as he would like to see them in the club-house. When they had gathered with many speculations as to the nature of his announcement, he addressed them in a brief speech.

"My faithful men, it grieves me to communicate to you what it is now necessary that you should know. For years you have been in my service and have performed well the tasks which I have given you. In every exigency you have been my efficient helpers ; to all my enterprises you have lent cheerful aid. Distasteful as is the duty, I must tell you that we can no longer maintain the relations of employer and workmen. Another man holds the deed of my farm, of which he can take possession whenever he desires. The money with which I could have temporarily satisfied him and paid you has been stolen. I would be doing you injustice if I allowed you to stay, when I am uncertain that I can requite your honest labor. My greatest trouble is that I am already owing you debts which must for the present remain unpaid. I might have avoided this. By leaving unfinished some of my projects I could have given you your wages when they were due. To think that I have wasted the substance which was placed in my hands, to feel that it was not mine, but yours, for you had earned it, is, indeed, the consummation of my misery. But you shall not be defrauded. If I am old, I am yet strong. I will work like a slave until you are paid. My hands shall yet remunerate the honest workmen whom my poor head has unintentionally cheated. I will sell my stock, my farming implements, my best furniture. My creditors shall have their just dues, and you shall be first remembered."

At the close of his speech the men crowded around him with expressions of sympathy. They assured him that they did not care for their pay. It was nothing compared to his loss. If he needed help, they would work for him all the summer and fall, and they would not charge a cent.

"No," said the major, "I can take no such sacrifice. You have lost enough through me."

"This is a sorry day, boys," said Daggett, as they were packing their trunks and valises. "The major's used up. I believe it'll kill him. Did you notice how down in the mouth he looked? If I had it to do over again, I'd put in some rattling days' work for that old man."

Daggett, wishing a home until he could find work, went to live with Osborne, to whose wife he was related. The other men Ratke persuaded to stay to dinner, but at one o'clock none of them were on the farm. Ratke sat in a rocking-chair with his chin resting on his hand and his left leg thrown over the chair-arm. In this position he had studied out most of his inventions.

"Now, I wouldn't mope, James," said Mrs. Grippin. "There's no use of your giving up."

"Give up?" answered the major, jerking his head from his hand, "not while I live. Misfortune may beat me down, may trample on me, may break my bones, but it shall not conquer me. I am not discouraged; I am thinking."

Ratke's despondency was greater than he would admit.

As he rocked back and forth, no reflections would come, except those of the most gloomy character.

"Uncle James," said Manie, thinking to divert his mind from his trouble, "we have a great deal of difficulty with the churning. I wish you would invent a churn for me."

"That I will, my little girl," said the major, again taking his hand from his chin. "Leave me alone awhile. I want to think."

"I have it, Manie!" he exclaimed at the expiration of half an hour. "I have the plan of an invention which will preserve the grain of the butter as well as the swing churn and do the quickest work which is done except by steam or water power. It is a dasher which gives the cream the rotary motion of the swing churn."

"James," interrupted Mrs. Grippin, "you don't know when we'll have to leave here. You better fill up all our ticks with new straw."

"Very well," said the major, rising at once.

He was nearly to the tool-house when Mrs. Grippin called after him, "Why, James Ratke, what do you want that coat on for this hot day? I should think you'd roast."

"I should be more comfortable with it off," said Ratke, who was too miserable to think of petty physical comforts. He went to the stack and pulled out some straw before he reflected that he had forgotten the ticks. He returned to the house and brought them out, one by one. Then he thoughtlessly emptied them near the path. Mrs. Grippin came to the door, expressed her displeasure at his act and advised him to take a wheel-barrow to carry back the filled ticks. Partly understanding her injunction, he took the wheel-barrow and brought several loads of straw near the pile of ticks.

"Take the ticks out to the straw-stack," called the housekeeper. "You're scattering the straw all over the yard."

Ratke meekly obeyed. He pulled the straw with no thought of what he was doing. He had tried to rivet his attention on the projected churn, but that was for any considerable length of time impossible. He was continually reminded of the farm whose ownership he had allowed to be wrested from him. He missed the clumsy jokes of the men. Archer's monotonous song was not echoing from a distant field. No teams were at work on his fallow. Stagnation had come to his enterprises, his energies, his hopes; and ambition, its clamor for food disregarded, had suddenly died.

"Right at it, Major," said the hearty voice of Durgenson. "I suppose the women got you into that."

"Yes," said Ratke, straightening from his stooping posture over a tick. "You are rather late, Durgenson."

"Yes," said the cattle-buyer, "but you see, I had business so I couldn't come. I hope I haven't made you any trouble by it. Has it made any difference to you?"

"A great difference to both of us," answered Ratke. "The money I had for you was stolen last night."

"What!" ejaculated Durgenson with genuine disappointment. "Stole! I wouldn't think you'd have let it got stole."

"I was up until nearly morning night before last," explained the major, "and last night I had one of my men act as guard. He slept at his post, and the thief came through a window, took the money and got away. I wish you had come yesterday."

"Well, I didn't," said Durgenson testily, "and I couldn't. What are you going to do about it? I've got to have something right away."

"There is nothing I can do," replied Ratke. "I am at your mercy."

"Oh, I won't be hard," said Durgenson. "All I want is what is fair. You can scrape me up a little, maybe, and I can wait on you for the rest."

"There is no more scraping to be done," said the major, "I have paid you all I can."

"You have a fair horse there," said Durgenson. "I'll take him and allow you a thousand dollars for him."

"I cannot possibly do that," said Ratke.

"And why not?" asked Durgenson. "I've got to have something if I wait, you know."

"I owe some debts for farm machinery," said Ratke.

"I owe four hundred dollars to the man of whom I bought Taylor, and I owe my men some hundreds of dollars."

"You can stave them off," said Durgenson. "Of course, they haven't any security. I wouldn't pay them a cent when I was so hard up. I'd wait till I was in better circumstances."

"They must be paid," said the major emphatically. "I promised it to them, and they must have it if I fast."

"But your men," said Durgenson, "they'd wait on you a spell."

"The laborer is worthy of his hire," said Ratke. "My men shall be paid before another creditor has the first dollar."

"You want me to wait until you pay everybody else," cried Durgenson angrily. "You can understand now that I won't do it. You promised me four thousand dollars, and I'm going to have something, or I'll shove you off the place."

"I am not to blame because you failed to come yesterday," said Ratke. "Neither am I to blame because of the theft. Neither am I to blame for wishing to pay my honest hired men first of all."

"Just as you like," returned Durgenson in a fury. "I'll send a man in the morning to shove you out into the street! Your promises are a waste of wind. You've fooled me all you are going to. I did think you was honest."

"Do you mean to say, you liar," cried the major, "that I misrepresented to you?"

"What!" exclaimed Durgenson. "Don't you call me a liar! I won't take that from any man!"

"You are a liar!" said Ratke, advancing and peering into the face of the cattle-buyer. "This is my place for to-day. Now go, or I will kick you off the premises! And do not say one word in leaving! Not one word," he continued, as Durgenson's lips moved.

Durgenson turned and moved slowly toward the road.

"Faster!" commanded Ratke, following close at his heels.

Durgenson quickened his pace, climbed hastily over the fence and stopped in the highway.

"Come over here if you want to fight!" he said. "Come right over here if you dare!"

Durgenson, in the prime of manhood, large and athletic, contrasted strongly with the haggard, white-haired old man who promptly climbed the fence to accept his challenge. Unfastening the top button of his coat and drawing from the garment his right arm, he stood undecided whether to give or to decline battle. As Ratke advanced with an expression of determination, he slipped his arm inside the coat and fastened the button, at the same time saying,

"I won't be guilty of fighting with an old man."

"Never mind the guilt," said the wrathful major. "You must either fight or leave, and that immediately."

"I don't like trouble," said Durgenson, making for his buggy. "I'll have you out of here to-morrow," he called, when he had got his horse under a round trot. "You've lied to me all I'm going to stand."

"You ought to have licked him," said Mrs. Grippin, who with the girls had come to the gate, afraid that the major might be harmed by the stalwart cattle-buyer.

"I will not chase a man to fight," said Ratke. "Maria, do you know where the cradle is? The reaper is broken, and the oats must be cut."

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Grippin. "You can't cradle. You never learned how. You had better get some one to cradle them, and you bind them up."

"I have no money to hire," said the major. "I must do the work myself. Manie, have you seen the cradle?"

"Yes," said Manie, "I saw it under the wagon shed. Let me go to Mr. Osborne's and get Mark to cut it, Uncle James. He will wait for his pay till you thresh the oats."

"I am afraid to run in debt any more," said Ratke. "I will do the work alone."

Resolutely he went out to the shed and took down the old turkey-wing cradle, which cut a very wide swath, and was intended to be used by a strong man. He was unused to the work, but he had cared for his health; and his strokes, though poorly directed, were vigorous. He could not keep from hitting the ground with the scythe. The old turkey-wing struck in high and, like a hawk, swooped down on the outer edge of the swath. Undiscouraged by his awkwardness, he whipped the cradle back and forth, making good time in spite of all difficulties. His face was covered with sweat, he was much fatigued and the upper part of his right fore-arm pained him excessively, yet he did not stop till near sundown. Weary, lame and disconsolate, he went to the house, where he found waiting the supper which he had no desire to eat.

" I must go at the chores," he said. " I had forgotten them."

" No, you don't want to go at any chores," said Mrs. Grippin. " You ought to know when you've done enough. You stay here, and Manie and I will do the chores. Act as though you had some sense. You don't want to be sick. I'll milk the cows, and Manie can look to the horses."

" I'll help," volunteered Nora, who was strangely sober. " I'll milk part of the cows, Aunt Maria."

" We'll go right out," said Mrs. Grippin stepping to the kitchen. " Nora, where did you put those pails ? "

" I left them on the shelves," said Nora.

" No, you didn't," said Mrs. Grippin. " They're not here. We'll have to take the water pails. That's all."

Near the barnyard they heard the sound of milk going into a tin pail, and, opening the gate, they saw that Daggett was stripping the last cow.

" Why ! " exclaimed Mrs. Grippin. " It was you that got the pails, Mark."

" Yes," said Daggett, " I looked over this way, and I got homesick. I wanted to come and chore around the old barn once more."

" I'm ever so much obliged to you," said Mrs. Grippin. " I hope I can make this up to you, Mark."

" I don't want it made up," said Daggett. " How's the major ? "

" He's about sick, and I'm afraid he's going to be. Durgenson was here to-day and talked hard to him. He's going to put us off to-morrow."

" We'll be right on hand if he tries that," said Daggett impetuously, " every man of us. We'll make him and his crowd wish they was somewhere else."

That night the major was restless. Harassed, overworked and overheated, he tossed from side to side in his efforts to find an easy posture. His head throbbed and became the seat of a dull pain. A strange roaring sound was in his ears, but, when he sat up in bed, it ceased. After it had several times recurred, and been dispelled by his assuming an erect position he gave up his attempts to discover its cause. The roaring grew so loud that he again rose to see if it were really an illusion. This time he was astonished to hear the unmistakable crackling of flames and to see sparks of fire flying past his window.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RAMOTH GILEAD.

CENTURIES of investigation have not revealed definitely the laws of mind and motive. It is true that their interpretation is attempted, that conduct is often prognosticated; but how often is the judgment set aside by that superior court, the actual occurrence. Montcalm's condition was complicated by the terrible excitement which he had undergone. He may have been sane or insane. It is my task not to explain but to narrate.

After his confederate, Boutwell, had failed in his attempt at robbery, Montcalm formed his second plan to thwart the cupidity of Durgenson. As he stood over Archer in Ratke's house, a strange fragment of memory came to him, a fragment which, even then, he strove to connect and locate. He had seen that dull countenance when it was impressive, when it had terrified him. Something of that terror returned. Suddenly he remembered his dream. He saw himself again flying through the swamp, he saw Archer arise, he heard the shot which stopped his progress.

His hand trembled as he removed the money-bag from Archer's head. It was then that he was seized with an unbalancing of self-possession, which sometimes consigns to an adverse fate even the bravest of men.

He was struck in the back by one of the shots which Archer fired. He ran nearly to the barnyard without becoming aware of the seriousness of his wound, but, when he reached the straw-stack, he comprehended that he was badly hurt. The swamp was toward half a mile distant and the intervening fields offered little protection. Too weak to go much farther, he crawled into a hole which the cattle had made in the stack, and at the entrance of which Daggett had placed some short rails to prevent its being enlarged. He burrowed as far as he could in the end of this cave, covering himself with the littering which lay thick on the bottom. Before he had completed the work of secretion, Ratke dashed past the opening. In the course of a minute he came back and but a few feet from Montcalm commenced to don his trousers.

Of the bodily and mental suffering endured by Montcalm that night and the succeeding day who but the One all-wise can ever know.

The day of anguish, the longest which Montcalm had ever known, drew near its close. The shadows deepened in the miserable dwelling where lay the miserable man.

Some one was again pulling straw from the stack. He raised his head to see who was disturbing his painful reflections. For a moment, as his gaze fell on Manie, he was glad, but his joy soon changed to longing and regret. He wished that the burden of his sin were lifted from him, that he were even then dying, and she his nurse. Peacefully he would pass into that world from which he now shrank, with her soothing hand upon his brow, with her sympathetic words sounding in his ears. While he was watching her, she hastily gathered the straw in her arms and ran toward the barn. Montcalm heard the conversation between Mrs. Grippin and Daggett. He envied this fellow with his never-failing fund of good spirits, his perfect adaptation to circumstances. He would have traded his identity for that of the most unlettered of the hired men, even for that of Archer with his ignorance and egotism and his sleepy, inexpressive face. His recollection during the night was singularly fruitful. Before him was spread out his whole life, a long manuscript, on which he read the beginning and the end of error. Of all events the most persistent in recurring was the murder of Green. The frightful gash, the staring eyes, the dripping of blood into the well, were presented as vividly to him as when, gloomy and inert, he stood by the body of his victim in the cellar. He recalled the minute particulars of the dream which succeeded his crime. How smooth was that river, and how typical was it of his boyhood. What would he not give to be as he was and sport in the meadows beside it, to plunge into its waters and cool the fever which was consuming his body and his soul. He believed he understood why Green had leered at him. That confident expression of triumph had been prophetic. The murderer had met and was meeting his reward. His encounter with Archer in the swamp was not meaningless. Its second enactment in Ratke's house had, indeed, stopped his flight and now promised to deliver him into the hands of that being who had taught him his bland deceit, whose recompense for service had been disappointment, remorse and ruin.

Once more Montcalm crawled from the stack for water. He had greatly weakened during the day. With faltering steps he went to the tank. He took a generous draught and wet his head and face. The cool water revived him, and his tottering legs grew stronger. He believed that his damnation was assured, and that he could add nothing to the punishment which was to be meted out to him. His one desire was to gratify his hatred of Durgenson. Very soon the estate would be in the hands of the dishonest stock-buyer. He surveyed the barns and the house. What a fine appearance they gave to the place, and at how little cost had Durgenson secured them. He tossed the bottle by the tank. He would need it no more. His lips closed tightly, his hands were clenched. He threw the bag of stolen money into the hollow which he had quitted, and walked to the small barnyard gate, where, hardly able to stand, he sat down. But his rest did not help him. He must go on before he was overtaken by exhaustion. He walked a few steps farther, and, sinking on the earth, commenced to crawl toward the house. The straw was scattered thickly along his route. He was obliged frequently to suspend his exertions, but he did not dare stop long, fearful that his little remaining energy would forsake him. From the place where one of the ticks had been emptied, he gathered some straw, which he carried in his arms. Rising once more, he traversed the small space which was between him and the house. He wished to get to the southwest corner of the building, but it seemed to him that he could go no farther. He raised himself on his elbow. Hugging the straw, he edged along on one arm and a leg. With deliberate desperation he measured his strength, knowing that if he were prodigal of it he must fail in his design.

At the corner he lay down for several minutes. A light wind was blowing from the southwest. He raised himself, placed the straw against the house and ignited it. The blaze caught in the dry clapboards and rose slowly, then rapidly toward the eaves.

Montcalm endeavored to escape to a cooler atmosphere. He crawled feebly to the edge of the spruce, and by a last pitiable effort succeeded in getting among them. A column of flame had mounted high in the house. The bright light and the dark rolling smoke reminded him of the awful glare he had seen in the mystic land of which he had dreamed, and he knew that his Ramoth Gilead had come.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RUIN.

The major gave a shout which awakened the inmates of the house. Manie called to Nora not to attempt to escape by means of her bedroom door, but to make her way out through the window. In this way the two girls safely passed from the building, though barely in time, as the fire was sweeping along the gables.

The major's first thought was of the manuscript of his unfinished work, "Naturæ Concordia Philosophiæ Animi." He rushed to the parlor to save his prized papers, but as he opened the door, there poured out a volume of smoke and heat which drove him staggering back. He gathered for another rush, intending to force his way through to the secretary which held his precious manuscript. Just then he was seized by Mrs. Grippin, Manie and Nora, who pushed him through the passage to the sitting-room.

"Don't be a fool, James," said Mrs. Grippin. "You can't get in there."

Brought back to reason by the familiar voice and address, Ratke instantly set to work to save his property. He pitched a bureau through a window. He sent after it chairs, a table, the sewing-machine, a lounge and a large clock. The heat and smoke had by this time grown so intolerable that he was obliged to retreat to the dining-room. There he threw furniture through the windows, and began to carry out crockery and kitchen utensils. Then he thought of saving the things which he had thrown through the windows, but it was too late. They were already enveloped in flame.

"Oh! look at the barns," cried Nora, when they had gone with their last load from the kitchen.

The trail of straw which the major had scattered had burned along its length and fired the nearer barn. The major ran out and turned loose the horses, which went racing around the barnyard, where the cattle were bellowing in affright. He opened a gate leading to the lane, when the mixed drove of animals hurried away to a place of safety. They had barely escaped when the straw-stack was lighted, every part of its surface almost instantly contributing to the blaze. On his return he was obliged to go around the barnyard, which had become too much heated to allow him to pass through it.

Humanity alone had sent him to the barns. His choicest inventions, which he was determined to rescue, were in the tool-house. When he arrived there, that building, too, was on fire. With a frantic plunge he went in at the fire-wreathed door and emerged, bearing his one-man saw. His New Jerusalem, the most precious of his mental creations, was still inside. His charred bones would have been mingled with the ashes and blackened irons had not Mrs. Grippin and Manie detained him.

"Let me go, Maria!" he said. "Let me go! I must save my wagon!"

"No, no," said Mrs. Grippin, with unusual tenderness. "You can't get it. No one can go in there now."

"Let go of me," he insisted, still struggling in the grasp of the three, for Nora had joined them. "I tell you I must save it. It is my only hope, and I can never have the heart to build it again."

They held him until the roof fell in and they knew by his quiet demeanor that his spasm of excitement had passed. Indifferent as to what next occurred, he seated himself on a stick of hewn timber near the road, and looked alternately from one blazing building to another. The club-house was out of range of most of the sparks which flew from Ratke's dwelling, but now and then shingles and other *débris* were dropped on the roof. By some of these it was lighted, and, before the destruction of any of the buildings was complete, it was crackling under a sheet of fire.

The oat-field joined the barnyard. The grain, thick, lodged and dead ripe, caught like tinder and sent a swift wave of flame across the field which ran to the marsh. Combustion was easy in the grass, which was there wideleafed and dry. It spread to the small bushes, where it grew in height and intensity. It swept with increasing speed over the outlying small trees, and up and above the loftiest tamaracks. For miles could be heard the steady roar and seen the long streams of fire which grandly illumined the night.

The women carried pail after pail of water to the club-house, but Ratke mechanically watched the swamp. Its high volume of flame, the grandest spectacle which he had ever seen, had a singular fascination for him. Benumbed, as he was, by the succession of misfortunes, he did not realize that he must leave the farm, that the Barton hundred and sixty had left his possession, or that his unpublished book and his Jerusalem wagon were burned. He did not speculate as to where his refuge would be on the morrow. He gave no concern to the fact that he was barefooted, homeless, hatless and coatless. He sat listlessly, occasionally turning to look at the women, the tool-house, the club-house, or his dwelling, which was now nearly consumed.

"Well, major, this is a bad business," said Sparks, who had approached. "Did you save anything!"

"Yes," answered Ratke, "we saved some dishes."

"That's a good deal better than nothin'," said Sparks. "You don't want to be gittin' down in the mouth now."

"No," said the major.

"Have you made any pervision for the needcessties o' the 'casion?"

"What provision?"

"Why, insurin'. Was you insured?"

"No."

"That's too bad. They don't any man know when such a needcessty is comin'. If he's prepared for it, he's all right. But if he ain't he's, as you might say, in a bad fix."

The major had no pugnacity left to resent the reproof of Sparks. He kept his seat on the stick of timber, while his unwelcome visitor went to interview and, perchance, to assist the women, who were still, though ineffectually, throwing water on the club-house.

"Ain't you got a hose for the pump?" asked Sparks.

"No," replied Mrs. Grippin.

"It would be a nice thing if you had one. You orto a been lookin' out for that."

Other neighbors arrived on the scene. Among them was the family of Holmes who lived near the church. Holmes said that the fire had done all the damage it could, as nothing was left about the premises for it to destroy. The major's folks might as well go home with him. He would think it a privilege to keep them as long as they chose to stay. Offers of hospitality were made by every one present.

"You can go home with me if you want to," said Sparks. "I ain't a goin' to say I won't give no help because the major was careless, forgitful like. Some folks is always careless, and other folks have to make it up to 'em."

"They're going home with me," said Holmes. "I spoke first, and they hadn't ought to disappoint me."

Jennie Holmes locked arms with Manie and Nora, and the three walked away.

"I must see to Uncle James," said Manie. "He feels so bad. Some one ought to comfort him."

"We will go back and get him," said Miss Holmes.

"Perhaps I had better go alone," said Manie. "He is used to me."

"Uncle James," said Manie, "we are going to Mr. Holmes's now."

"Very well," said Ratke. "No doubt it is best for you to go."

"But you must come too."

"Manie," said the major, looking up for the first time since her approach, "I want to stay here. I want to watch the machinery which I have constructed, perishing, as have my hopes for its success, eaten out piece by piece, always with a circle of ashes around the unconsumed part. Do you see the New Jerusalem? The high posts and the boxes are about gone. The spokes are burned well to the center of the wheels. I cannot go until those burn out."

"You had better come," argued Manie. "It will do you no good to stay here."

"Yes, it will," said Ratke. "All my dearest earthly possessions are in those embers. They are dying, and I must be with them to the last. The fire is burning out of them all except the hard iron. It is burning out of me everything except the harder and sterner feelings."

"I did not think you were the one to give up, Uncle James," said Manie.

"Give up?" said the major. "No, I never gave up to man or misfortune, and I never will. I am not begging, or cringing, but I am crushed, and I have ceased to struggle. I care not what happens, I am ready to meet it. Despair has no further depth to open for me. My senses are blunted. I am in no great mental pain. I have suffered so much that my capacity for suffering is exhausted. Leave me now, Manie. I want to be alone."

"I will not leave you," said Manie. "You shall not stay here alone in this barbarous fashion."

"You have always obeyed me," said the major sorrowfully. "I thought you would not choose this as the time to break my command."

Much as she disliked to go, Manie could not violate the gentle command of her uncle. She walked slowly, that she might not join Miss Holmes and Nora, for she was crying bitterly, not for herself, not for their property, but for the noble-hearted old major, whose reason, she believed, was certainly giving way.

Now and then the group in advance cast back glances at the conflagration. The brilliant display in the swamp exceeded that of the buildings, as much as their light had exceeded that of the match by which they were kindled.

The inhabitants of Break o' Day were awakened by clouds of smoke rolling in at their open windows. Rising, they perceived here and there waving pillars of fire standing out against the western sky, the torches which the dead tamaracks swayed while their green companions were being slowly undermined. They could not see that unbroken sheet which curtained the opposite side of the swamp, but they saw and heard enough to fill them with consternation. They harnessed teams, they loaded wagons with furniture and prepared to leave their village the instant its destruction seemed imminent. But, in the interior of the swamp, where there was no grass, and where the only inflammable material was the muck and the few dry trees, the fire traveled with less rapidity than at the edge. The people perceived that, though they had cause for apprehension, there was no immediate danger; and the exodus was postponed. A few of the business men, including Dr. Rorus, wished to have a better view of the conflagration. The road westward, however, was in all likelihood too hot to be traversed by observers in comfort. They went, therefore, for a distance along the Sharptown road, turning south past Briggs's, proceeding west at Barton Junction, and finally bringing up at the corner by Takum's.

At Holmes's the two families made a pretense of retiring to sleep. They rose early, and after breakfast went back to Ratke. Before them had arrived the party from Break o' Day, the major's hired men and a number of farmers. Ratke was still sitting by the tool-house, looking at the few points of flame which clung about his Jerusalem wagon. He hardly spoke to his friends and ignored, or answered briefly, their questions. Manie went close to their ruined dwelling. Some blackened sheets of paper, well-preserved in shape, were where the bookcases had been, and among them she saw a page of "Naturæ Concordia Philosophiæ Animi," which could be easily read, but which fell in pieces as soon as it was touched.

"Something ought to be done for him," said Holmes. "He's lost everything he had. We can all give a little, and it won't hurt us."

"I s'pose we can," said Sparks, "there's been the north fire sufferers an' the Oakville sufferers, an' now there's sufferin' to be helped here. I'm willin' to help, but of course it pulls on the pocket-book."

"Some one better pass around a hat and a paper," suggested Holmes. "The ones that have it by them give money, and the ones that haven't put down what they will give."

"I'll pass 'em," said Sparks. "Now, gentlemen, who's a goin' to give somethin' to Major Ratke. He's been a havin' kind o' bad luck. Of course he orto a made pervision for it. There ain't no question about that. But he didn't, an' he can't help it. Nor there can't nobody help it;" and he held a silver dollar high above his head that his generosity might be observed.

The offers of charity roused Ratke, who had been deaf to all other sounds. "Gentlemen," he said, "I can accept no charity. I am able to work." Then he went back to his seat on the stick of timber, forgetful of the kindness which was ready to succor him.

"That knocks the bisness on the head," said Sparks. "We can't do a thing if he won't take it."

"No, it don't," said Daggett. "Just come along this way a little where he can't hear us. They ain't got a place to stay, and we ought to do what we can to help 'em. Miss Grippin will take that and buy what they need, and the major won't think to inquire where she got it."

"I don't feel like givin' in no such way," said Sparks.

"Then we don't want you to," said Daggett. "If a man is too stingy to give anything, let him keep his money to himself."

"Oh, I'll hand it over to Miss Grippin," said Sparks quickly. "I was only a sayin' I didn't like such a roundabout way o' helpin' him."

"Miss Grippin," said Jake Sheppard, "mebbe you knew I bought that house an' lot this side o' the church, where Halleck used to live."

"No, I didn't," answered Mrs. Grippin.

"Yes, I bought it, an' I ain't no use for it. I'd like to have somebody in the house, an' I rather have you than any one else."

"You can speak to James about it," said Mrs. Grippin.

"You see we don't hitch very well," said Jake, "that is, he don't like me. I ain't got nothin' agin him. I don't want any rent. We'll have you some furniture there in no time. You can go right in from here. The major wouldn't never think o' askin' who owned it."

"Thank you, I'll do that," said Mrs. Grippin.

A shriek rang out among the evergreens. Hastening to the spot, the curious spectators found Nora lying in a faint. Beside her was the body of Montcalm, with the face turned upward in an expression of anguish which the great heat, though it had roasted his flesh, had not obliterated. The hair was burned from his head, and the clothing hung on his body in ashes. The discovery produced that silence which awe enjoins on curiosity. Nora was carried away, and measures were taken for her restoration to consciousness. For a moment the lookers-on did not crowd about the body of Montcalm. But, presently overcoming their timidity, they pressed closer and soon became convinced of his identity.

"Ah! what have we here?" exclaimed Rorus. "Another murder! Another case under your jurisdiction, Sparks."

"I wonder if I hadn't better call the jury right together?" asked Sparks.

"Certainly, certainly," said Dr. Rorus, breathing fumes of whiskey in the justice's face. "Every man, every good citizen, every poor citizen for that matter, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, all of 'em ought to be be ready to put down crime. Crime, which kills, crime, which steals, crime, which robs, crime, which forges, crime, which slanders, crime, which—does mean acts, crime is the worst curse this country ever had and the most destructive to its morality."

Sparks chose the jury and began to make inquiries about witnesses. "We'll have to have the major first," he said. "He seen him about the last of anybody around here."

"Don't go to bringin' him," said Jake. "He thought his eyes o' this feller. It would nigh about kill 'im."

"I don't see how we're a goin' to help it," said Sparks. "We've got to investigate an' we've got to have testimony."

"Can't be helped," said Rorus. "Can't be helped. Millions of men have died for law. If we have to sacrifice one, we'll stand to it like heroes."

"You know it'll clean use 'im up," said Jake. "If you make 'im come here, you orto be licked."

The major at last arose from the timber. Hearing the dispute in the evergreens, he listlessly walked in that direction. Near the trees he went around Daggett, who purposely stood in his way. Jake, as a last resort, put both his hands on the shoulders of some spectators and, gripping tightly without appearing to notice him, endeavored to prevent him from passing.

"Let me through, Jake," said Ratke.

Jake reluctantly yielded. The major pushed his way through and came unexpectedly upon the dead man. He said nothing, but, looking long and searchingly, he read the story of the robber and the incendiary. The son of his old comrade, his friend whom he had almost worshiped had perished in the act of destroying his home. His golden idol was but shattered clay. Slowly he turned from the body with an expression of unutterable despair and went back to the hewn timber. Neither Sparks nor Rorus had the heart to insist on his revisiting the spot.

"If they hadn't a made such a fuss, he wouldn't a went up," said Jake to Mrs. Grippin. "Now they've done it, I s'pose they're satisfied. You better git him home as quick as you can, Miss Grippin."

"He don't act right," said Mrs. Grippin. "I'll have Manie take him away."

"Come, Uncle James," said Manie, slipping her arm through his, "we have a home now in that little house by the church. Let us go there, you and I."

The major did not seem to hear her. He still gazed abstractedly at the ashes of the tool-house but at last yielded more to the gentle tugging at his arm than to her words. Casting a last look at the irons of the New Jerusalem, he rubbed his knuckles twice across his forehead and went silently with his niece.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOHN HEARS AN ACCOUNT OF HIS ADVENTURE.

THE morning after his visit to Ratke's John left Mrs. Boyle's house. To the very last she opposed his departure.

"I have special reasons for wanting you to stay, John," she said. "I can't tell you what they are, but I wish you wouldn't go."

"It is impossible for me to stay longer," said John.

"Then," said Mrs. Boyle, "you'll tell me where you are going."

"I will write after I get settled," answered John. "But you will keep the knowledge of my whereabouts to yourself. I wonder if a mother were ever as kind as you have been to me. Good-bye."

John found Barton Junction to consist of a store and a depot. He had been in the depot but a short time when two young men entered the waiting-room and stood near an old lady whose baggage was strewn about the seats. The young men had the appearance of rowdies, although they were quite well dressed. Both wore dark suits and felt hats. One hat was girt with a flat and one with a round braid. The younger, who wore the flat-braided hat, seemed to be an ardent admirer of the other, for he simulated many of his actions. He was most anxious to acquire the dexterity which his companion exhibited in ejecting tobacco-spittle through his teeth in a fine stream. He attempted this feat so frequently, and his teacher gave him so plentiful instruction that the floor was soon spotted with yellow stains, and the old lady hastily began picking up the articles on the seats to keep them from pollution.

"Where did you get that hat, Tom ?" asked the younger man, trying to train his mustache to curl upward and then lop down at the ends as did that of his comrade.

"Oh, I got that to Port Huron," said the one addressed with the air of an instructor. "They're all the rage now."

"It's nobby, sure enough. Guess I'll have to git one," said the imitator, sending a small stream of tobacco-juice almost into the satchel with a skill which until then he had not attained.

The good old lady was not fretful, but she was averse to having her queer mixture of luggage subjected to such treatment. Without the haste and nervousness with which most women would have performed the task, she arranged the several parts of her baggage and prepared for departure.

"Did you ever hear anything of that feller that stole Whipple's colt?" said the young man, who was called Tom. "I ain't been around here much this summer, you know, and I didn't learn much about it."

"No, they never heard anything of him. He was sharp, that feller was, and they wanted to keep right out of his way."

"How do you know, Al? Did you see him?"

"See him?" repeated Al. "I guess I did! I was in a boat trying to head him off, and he shot within four inches of my hand, and the next time the ball just skipped over my head. I tell you that was a close call, Tom."

"Why didn't you head him off?" inquired Tom.

"Oh, he slipped by some way and got away from us. He dove into them tamaracks, and then all Michigan couldn't have caught him."

"Didn't you all feel kind o' timid?" asked Tom. "Wasn't you a little afraid when he come close to you?"

"Timid? No, sir! I told him just what I thought of him, called him every name I could lay my tongue to."

"The train's a comin'," said a rustic looking man who had been watching from the outside.

Wrengell, who had been for some minutes uneasy in his quarters, yet afraid to show any sign of impatience, made for the door as soon as he heard the first rumble of the approaching wheels. He was aboard while the cars were still butting each other back and forth in the last few jerks before the total suspension of motion. A blue cloud and an odor of tobacco announced to him that in his haste he had taken the smoking-car. With the consolation that there were worse odors than that of tobacco and that he was in the presence of strangers, he seated himself, but his brief season of congratulation was cut short by the entrance of the young men who had been discussing his adventure.

After a few preliminary puffs and jerks the engine started with its load from Barton Junction. As the little depot and the diminutive store with its proprietor on the steps moved backward into the separating distance, neither the voices about him nor the danger of recognition by his former pursuer could keep him from sending a protracted farewell look in the direction of Ratke's. It would be long before he could retrace his steps. During the period of waiting, whose extent was painfully uncertain, he would often in his boundless fancy send the reverberations of his music through the major's parlor, would wander through an orchard with springing leaves and opening blossoms, would pass his arm about an object beside whose attraction that of the richly-clad trees was insipid, if not forgotten. And how, when he had fed on the husks of dreams and found in them no nutriment, would he grow restless, waiting for the reality which did not come, how his heart would sink if year after year the struggle for respectability was continuous and unavailing. He was aroused from his reverie by some negroes in front of him noisily playing High, Low, Jack and the Game. Soon after, he became conscious that the young men whom he had seen in the depot were engaged in a talk, which was likely to prove interesting to him.

"They nabbed Wallace and Ab, nice," remarked the one who was called Al.

"So I heard," answered his companion, "but I didn't learn how they done it."

"Oh, that was Jerusalem Ratke's work," said Alf. "You know in the spring they had what they called a 'committee of five,' to hunt out the thieves. After they had the big hunt, everybody got disgusted and didn't go a cent's worth on the committee. All of 'em laid the whole blame off on Ole Jerus'lem. But, when they had such a time with that feller, what was his name?—Wrengell—they found a road that had been cut out in the swamp, yes, sir, a regular road, and a place where horses had been kept. Then Ole Jerus'lem, he was hot, you know, he raised a big rumpus. He said if anybody hurt his man, Wrengell, they'd be sorry for it. Somebody noticed that Ab and the ole man wasn't to home the next day, so what did Ole Jerus'lem do but hatch up a plan with the committee (Green was dead, and this here Montcalm had gone away), hatch up a plan with the committee, you know, to watch the house nights. They didn't stay away only one day. They come back, and one night Jim Turner was a watching—he thinks there never was a man like Jerus'lem—he saw 'em go out of the house. He followed 'em down beyond Oakville, and there they got a horse from a barn that belonged to a man by the name of Matthews. Jim saw 'em go to their own barn with the horse, and then he went home. In the morning he got out a warrant for 'em and took 'em to Jackson."

At the next station a young fellow walked into the smoking-car.

"Helloa, Jim," said Tom, "we was just a-talking about you."

"I hope it wasn't anything bad," said the new-comer.

John gave a start as he listened to the words. For a moment he vainly tried to recollect where he had heard that voice, as he was certain that he had met its owner, but he soon became assured of the young fellow's identity. He was in the presence of Jim Turner, who has been given in two preceding chapters the distinction only of being a friend to Ratke and of wearing a peculiar white hat. He was alarmed at the new arrival. A boy came into the car selling books, pamphlets and papers. John bought a large pamphlet and held it so as to shield him from the observation of Turner, who was seated with his back toward him, but who would, according to all likelihood, occasionally glance backward as he conversed with his companions.

"Oh, yes. We was giving you Jesse," said Tom. "We was talking about your getting that horse away from Wallace."

"I didn't get him away," said Turner.

"I thought you followed 'em to the barn."

"Yes, I did," assented Turner, "that is, purty near there. I come back, me and the sheriff, and we couldn't find a horse nor a track, nothing but Wallace's old plugs."

"Well, now, that's funny," said Tom. "I don't see where they could have gone to."

"Nor I neither," answered Turner. "Funniest thing I ever heard of. I didn't know but maybe the major could help me out of that. He's got a head on him, Mister Man, if he is cracked about his Jerusalem wagon. Didn't he come it slick on that Boutwell, boys?"

"I guess so," said Tom. "The old man pummeled him, didn't he?"

"Larrupped him like all possessed," said Turner. "He turned him over to me, and the fellow had some bad marks on him."

At this point Turner's companions got into a trivial discussion over which they staked a quantity of beer. John ventured to look out of a window. Fence posts and telegraph-poles were rushing swiftly by, while far-away hills and woods seemed to move more slowly, the apparent speed varying according to the proximity of the spectator to the place of observation, the nearer objects seeming to pass between him and the more distant ones. The country was comparatively level, the hills, therefore, sloping, and the cuts through which the track ran long and shallow. The land was well wooded and diversified, here and there, by low and uncultivated strips. Traces of the terrible drought were everywhere apparent. One marsh was blackened by fire and still smoking. Next on the route was a small stream which was overhung by stubby willows.

At Sharptown Jim Turner and the young men who had rode from Barton Junction left the train. Sharptown was built on the first of a series of hills which was spread over the greater part of Washtenaw County. From this village eastward the track ran alternately through deep cuts and along elevated grades. The great bumps which roughened the face of the country were scattered thickly about, hiding the smaller ones, which in other places would have been called large. While they were halting at a small station, John saw, even through the smoke-dimmed atmosphere, five elevations, rising one behind the other according to the order of size, the largest in the background.

Wrengell terminated his ride at Ann Arbor. He ascended a rise of ground and came to the main part of the city.

"Can you tell me where the hospital is?" he inquired of a young fellow who had the air of a student.

"Which one?" asked the fellow.

"I hardly know," answered John. "I thought there was only one."

"Well," said the young fellow, "there is but one that amounts to anything. You don't want anything to do with those homeopathic quacks. Go around the corner, and you will see a large square building with parts built on it. Just beyond it you will see another like it, and on that one you will see University Hospital in large letters. You are sure you can find it?"

"I think so," said John.

"I think I had better go with you," said the fellow, turning about and accompanying Wrengell. "If you should get in with those Homeopathists, you wouldn't get a bit of help. What is the trouble with you?"

"A trouble which I have had a long time," answered John.

"Excuse me," said the guide. "Patients don't always like to tell their ailments. That is the building there, where that man is standing."

"I am obliged to you for your trouble," said John as the young man hurried away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AMONG THE INVALIDS.

JOHN stood in front of a square building which was a few paces from the street. From the rear of the square part, at either side, branched wings, which turned and joined in a large structure after proceeding back for some distance. Wrengell subsequently learned that the wing at the left was the men's ward, that at the right was the women's, and the part where they joined in the rear was the clinical amphitheater, in which surgical operations were performed.

The man to whom the student had alluded had gone inside the yard, and was about to enter the men's ward. He was a sandy-haired man of about fifty, with very thin, sandy whiskers. A defective mustache and a beardless strip on either side of his under-lip exposed in its full ugliness his mouth, which was repulsive in the extreme. His face was red and unprepossessing, as if liquor had swollen its veins and thoughts of crime had governed its expression.

"How do you do?" he said with a smile, which he meant to be affable, but which lifted the few hairs on his upper lip and uncovered his mouth in a way which seemed hideous to John. "Come here for treatment, have you?"

"Yes," answered John shortly.

The man opened the door.

"Come right in," he said, as if he were inviting a guest to enter his mansion. "You must make yourself at home here."

A long hall separated the two divisions which were allotted to the respective sexes. The men's ward was a large room with a row of narrow beds on each side, which were capable of holding comfortably but one occupant. By the head of every bed was a stand on which was a wash-bowl and a pitcher. The white face of one invalid rested on a pillow near the door. The rest of the patients were able to sit up; most of them, indeed, were apparently healthy. The diseases treated were, as a rule, of a chronic nature and, with the exception of deformed limbs and abnormal growths, few of them gave to an unpracticed observer any indication of their existence. Several men were reading. A number were sitting down, engaged in no visible occupation. Some were conversing in pairs. One man was entertaining several listeners with an anecdote of the civil war.

"They come from all over," said John's new acquaintance, "from New York and Massachusetts and from California, and one from Texas. This is a great university, and we ought to be proud of it. Let me see, where do you hail from?"

"I have no permanent home," replied John. "I stay where I happen to be called by business."

"Very good plan," said his new acquaintance. "Make the best of your lot, wherever you be. Let me see, what is your name?"

"Wrengell," answered John.

"Is that so," said his companion. "Was you ever in Branch County?"

"I have traveled around the state some, and I may have been there," replied John, his countenance reddening.

"Is your name John?" the man inquired.

"What if it is?" said Wrengell in desperation. "What do you know of me?"

"I guess we're pretty near relatives," said the man, again lifting his thin mustache. "I'm sure of it. Wasn't your father's name Archibald?"

"What do you know of him?" asked John, growing sick at heart.

"Quite a bit," said the disagreeable stranger, "as much as any man knows about his brother. We was twins. You don't say he wasn't your father. Now, tell me honest, isn't your name John?"

"It is," admitted John.

"I was sure of it," said the elder Wrengell, grasping

John's hand. "I've found my nephew that I haven't heard anything of for eight years. You're just the picture of Archie when he was of your age. Your mother was dark. Here comes a doctor. He'll take down your name, and you'll have to give an account of your disease. Doctor Webb, this is my nephew, Mr. Wrengell."

"May I see you alone?" asked John.

"Certainly," replied the doctor.

John, in an embarrassed way, explained to the medical man that he wished a deformity removed. He was assured that on the morrow the sixth toe would be amputated. He was returning from the consultation when he saw approaching him a middle-aged lady who carried a lead-pencil and a note-book. The officious uncle, also espying her, came toward John.

"Mrs. May," he said, "I'll introduce my nephew, Mr. Wrengell, John Wrengell."

"I suppose you know the rules of this establishment, Mr. Wrengell?" said the lady.

"No, I do not," said John, afraid that in his ignorance he had broken some rule of the hospital.

"Oh, he isn't used to this place, you know," said the elder Wrengell apologetically. "He means all right. Johnny's a good boy."

"The rule is to pay a week's board in advance," said Mrs. May, "three dollars and a half. I suppose that you will be willing to be governed by it."

"Perfectly," answered John, "I will pay you now."

Hereafter in speaking of John we will omit his surname, applying it in distinction only to the elder Wrengell. John's spirits sank to a low ebb after his entrance to the hospital. He, of all men, proud, sensitive and aspiring, could least afford to be hampered by so objectionable a clog as Wrengell. The very clothes which the man wore looked to John to be the fitting garb of the sot and convict. The sand-colored coat was of the same hue as one which John had worn when he attended district school. He well remembered that garment, which had awakened so much ridicule. The boys had jerked him down by it. Once they had stripped it from him, torn it and almost buried it in the dirt, in which it had been hardly distinguishable. Some of them had held him so that he could not see where they put it and it had taken him a long time to find it. Ever since then he had hated sand-colored coats.

His history was being repeated. He was leaving behind him shameful associations, ignorance was loosing its grip, poverty had already parted with much of its evil power, they were all about to slacken their influence and allow him the esteem of men, when another disgrace bound him to them anew. What would Manie say when she saw his uncle and heard him give his affectionate regards to his nephew "Johnny"? Had he known, as he stood before the hospital, the vexatious surprise which awaited him, he could have turned from it and gone his way. He thought now of leaving the city, but he concluded to wait until the operation had been performed.

"Johnny," said Wrengell, "you didn't tell me whether you'd ever lived in Branch or not."

"Let us take a walk," said John, not wishing his companion's speculations to be overheard.

"All right," responded Wrengell, "that'll please me. Where had we better go now, to the museum?"

"No, I do not care to go there," answered John.

"We can just walk then," said Wrengell. "I ain't particular. I've seen everything they have there anyway. I didn't know but you might have some curiosity. I see you don't think we're any relation."

"I suppose every member of the human family is related to every other member," replied John. "If we could trace it to Adam, we might prove our relationship."

"I can do it without," said Wrengell, with a pleased look which made him appear particularly villainous. "I know all about you, as much as a man ought to know about his nephew. You lived with a man by the name of Norris. He was in the township of Terry. I don't remember the section, but there's a swamp in the northeast corner of his farm, a little swamp. Now, you won't say you never picked huckleberries in that swamp."

John was silent.

"I thought you wouldn't," said Wrengell. "You must have heard Norris speak about your Uncle Arthur, Art, sometimes they call me. We was twins, but Archie didn't look so much like me as Reuben. Your father was tall, like you. Now, I can tell you how old you are. You was born twenty-two years ago last February. You are a month younger than my boy, Dan. Dan looks some like you, too. You're both regular Wrengells."

"Where does he live?" asked John, too miserable to resent Wrengell's persistence in enforcing his society.

"He's in trouble now," replied Wrengell. "He's in the House of Correction at Ionia. The way of it was, a fellow Dan was intimate with stole a box of cigars. Then he bet a box of cigars with Dan. Dan he's sharp if he is my boy, he won 'em. They found the cigars with him. Now, Johnny, are you going to disown me, your uncle, the only uncle you've got? You don't seem so glad to see me as I expected you to. If you don't want me to, I won't say anything more to you."

"Let me think it over," said John. "I want to do right. But let us say nothing of our family affairs before listeners."

"That's a good plan," assented Wrengell. "We've been unlucky, the Wrengells have."

The following day surgical operations were performed in the clinical amphitheater, and John parted with his sixth toe. He felt no reluctance at the separation. The member had rendered him no service, had given him no comfort. He could not help reflecting, however, that he had exchanged a concealed for an open disgrace.

Wrengell was disagreeably kind during John's recovery from the amputation. He brought him water and tried to smile encouragingly on him. It seemed to John that he kept the coat which awakened such detested recollections constantly before his eyes. Several days after the operation was performed, he walked into the ward with a pair of crutches. "I thought you'd need these, Johnny," he said. "You see your uncle don't forget you."

"What did they cost?" asked John.

"We don't care anything about the cost," answered Wrengell. "They're a present."

"But I care," said John. "I do not want you to pay out your money for me."

"Now, Johnny, I feel as though I'd like to," said Wrengell. "You will let your uncle do this for you, won't you?"

John, disliking to wound Wrengell's feelings, accepted the gift. His maimed foot made rapid progress toward recovery. It was, no doubt, fortunate on account of his sprained ankle, which was not entirely well, that he was for a season kept from stepping on his left foot. At times the thought occurred to him that he might be followed and identified as the suspected horse-thief who had fled from Break o' Day. He had hesitated to give his real name at the hospital, but the reported change of popular sentiment in his favor and his aversion to adopting a subterfuge which was worthy of his ignoble parentage induced him to pursue the more open course.

One day in the hospital he was sitting in an arm-chair by his bed. Near him was a man who had a hard bunch, about as large as a walnut, on one side of his neck.

"This is the dullest place I ever got into," was the observation of this latter individual, as he laid down a newspaper with a yawn. "Read, mope, talk, walk around, sleep, that's all there is to it. I don't see as I'm any better than I was when I come. I come far enough so I ought to get help, from old Genesee County, New York. They had good doctors there, first-rate. I wanted to try them. But I'd heard a good deal about Ann Arbor. My friends they kept harping, 'Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor. Go to Ann Arbor. They can do big things to Ann Arbor.' And now I've got here, I wish I was back. They had a better doctor right there in Batavia; he's dead now, but he was a better doctor than they've got in this whole institution. He could tell what was the matter with you as quick as he saw you. These fellows don't know anything about it. They only guess. They're just as apt to get it wrong as right."

The dissatisfied New Yorker picked up his paper and scanned a column which he had previously overlooked.

"Well, now," he exclaimed, "if these Michigan folks don't beat all. Roughest set I ever see. Here's a man stole some money, got shot and then went back and set a big house afire.'"

"Where did that happen?" asked John.

"Maybe you'd like to read it," said the New Yorker, handing John the paper.

John could hardly repress his excitement as he learned the tragic story of Montcalm's death and the burning of Ratke's house. He sincerely mourned Montcalm, and his sympathy for the unfortunate family of the major was unbounded. He tried to smother the thought that the event, so disastrous to his friends, had raised his prospect of success merely by lowering the standard to which he was aspiring. For this selfish consolation he detested himself, and the remorse which he felt for harboring it more than equaled the satisfaction which it afforded.

He immediately wrote a letter to Manie, expressing his sorrow for their loss. Ignorant of the extent of the major's misfortunes, he supposed that he would remain on his farm where he would erect a new house. He was now able to wear slippers and to walk about with the aid of his crutches. Putting the letter, which was not yet stamped, on the stand by his bed, he prepared to go to the street.

"Going up town?" queried Wrengell.

"Yes," said John.

"Guess I'll go too," said Wrengell, "if you've no objections. Maybe you think rather hard of me, Johnny," he began when they were on the sidewalk. "Of course you've heard Norris tell something about me."

"I have heard something of you," said John.

"I reckoned likely," pursued Wrengell. "I've been slandered. I was unfortunate, as he told you, of course, and got behind the bars in Jackson. But, Johnny, I wasn't guilty. I swear to you on my word of honor, the word of honor of your uncle, I wasn't guilty. I don't blame the jury nor the judge. My freedom was swore away, and it was done by a fellow I'd helped a good deal. Some things was took from a jewelry store in Detroit, that wasn't a great ways from where I lived, just about four blocks. It didn't worry me much when an officer arrested me for it, for I knew I could prove my good character. I said, 'All right, sir, you won't keep me long.' I was a little worried when they brought in the jewelry and said they found it tucked away in my house. My lawyer said to me, 'That looks bad, Wrengell. If you hadn't bore an awful good character, you wouldn't never get out of this.'

'Let 'em work,' I said. 'My reputation is too good for me to be hurt much. Anybody that knows Arthur Wrengell knows he won't steal.' Why, I've had rich men, the best men there was in Detroit and the most influential there was Zack Chandler, said to me, 'Wrengell, if I had warning that I was going to die to-morrow, I'd will my property to you and write you a note telling you how I wanted it divided. I'd be sure you wouldn't keep a cent.' But I was beat when Bill Weeks swore he met me on the stairs in my house the night the things was stole. I knew that settled it, and I might as well throw up the sponge. I'd helped Bill to get the position he had as clerk, and pushed him along every way I could. He was intimate with my folks. The day I was arrested, it was raining. He spent his money as fast as he earned it and was hard up. He come and wanted to borrow my rubber coat. I didn't think but what he was all right, and I said, 'Go right upstairs and get it yourself, Bill.' He must have left the things up there then.

"The jury brought in a verdict of guilty. The judge didn't believe I took the things, but he had to sentence me, according to the evidence. He was in tears when he done it. Chandler, he was mad. He said it was the biggest outrage he ever heard of. He worked a long time, trying to get a pardon from the governor. When he couldn't make it out, he told him it would be his last term and so it was. Lots of folks wonder how the governor come to be defeated in the convention. Old Zack can tell 'em, and so can I."

"I have forgotten my letter," said John. "I must go back."

"That's bad, to have to make two trips," said Wrengell. "You haven't heard from your father lately, Johnny?"

"No," was John's brief answer.

"Neither have I," said Wrengell, "not for some years. Between you and me, I'm afraid Archie got into a bad scrape in Minnesota. I'm afraid he did. They proved it right up. I wouldn't tell anybody else so, but this is in the family. Your mother never comes to see you?"

"No," said John.

"She was peculiar," remarked Wrengell, after they had walked two blocks in silence. "I don't say as there was anything bad about her, only she was peculiar. She would drink hard. I think maybe that was what got her into trouble. When she was under the influence of liquor, she didn't think how wrong it was to take what didn't belong to her."

Imagine the sensations of John while he was listening to the protracted account of his family from one of its members. How long must he be tied to this man, whose tongue was an incessant torture.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BEGINNING OF MYSTERY.

An unusual number of patients were gathered around some object of interest in the men's ward, which ordinarily was well-nigh deserted in the middle of the day. As John drew near the group, but one voice was distinguishable and that was speaking as follows:

"There was a man out in Lenawee had a bunch on his neck like that, only it was on the left side instead of the right. He'd been here, and he'd been to one of these traveling doctors that tucks his advertisements and his pictures in the papers. Get help? Of course he didn't get any help. Then, after he'd tried everything else, I sold him a bottle of panacea. I told him to put it on three days and then leave it off three days. The first three days the bunch got soft. The next three days it commenced to go away. When he put on the medicine, it softened it up, but it wouldn't start to go away until he quit putting it on. Just as soon as he quit, it would go down a little, and after three days it would get hard again. There was something strange about that. He kept on that way a month, and his neck was cured, and it never bothered him again. The next time I saw him he was practicing lifting things with his teeth. He had a leather fastened to a barrel of cider, and he'd churn the barrel up and down. He talked of practicing up to go with a show. I didn't hear, though, whether he did or not."

"I don't give a continental for the strengthening part," said the New Yorker. "All I care about is to take the bunch off."

"That's what this will do," said Panicky, for it was indeed he. "Helloa!" he exclaimed, as he espied John moving away on his crutches. "I'd like to see you a minute. Will you wait till I get through talking with this man?"

"Yes," responded John, who had intended to slip from the hospital unobserved.

"I'll be through here directly," said Panicky, "now, if this don't give perfect satisfaction, you can bring it back."

"You seem to be in very bad shape," observed Panicky, to a man who was blowing his nose.

"Yes," answered the patient, "I'm in bad shape. I've got the catarrh, and I guess I always will have it."

"Oh no, you won't," answered Panicky, "not if you doctor it right. Three weeks is all I ask to cure that in."

"Three weeks," echoed the sufferer, "you're wild. You're just talking to sell."

"I'll tell you why I think so," said Panicky, "and after I've explained it, you'll think as I do. The panacea reduces unnatural growths. That is what it is designed expressly for. Now, I wouldn't advise that man with the scrofula to use it, for it wouldn't help him a bit. This is on the same principle as taking off a swelling, you see, bringing the blood-vessels down to their normal size and destroying inflammation and clearing the nasal passages."

"Oh, I don't hardly think it would help me," said the man with the catarrh.

"I've cured eleven cases of catarrh this summer," assured Panicky. "Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you get sick of your bargain, I'll take the medicine back any time."

"That's fair enough," said the patient after a sneeze. "I'll take a bottle, but I don't have much hope that it will help me."

"Come along this way," said Panicky, grabbing his satchels and hurrying to John. "I see a doctor coming," he explained as they left the hospital. "If he should see me in there and know what I was doing, he wouldn't like it. These doctors act as though nobody knew any medicine but themselves. They caught me in there once, and they made an awful fuss. Now, I come down here on purpose after you, I thought I might as well sell a little medicine while I was here."

"What do you want of me?" asked John, instantly thinking of his experience at Break o' Day.

"I can't explain it," said Panicky. "I was sent by a certain person to bring you if you'd come, and to pay all your expenses."

"Who is the person?" asked John.

"That I can't tell you," said the peddler. "All I can say is, that it is something of great importance to you, and that, if I was in your place, I wouldn't miss it for money."

"I will go," said John, as his mind reverted to the elder Wrengell.

"Then get what you've got to get, and let's be out of this," said Panicky.

John went back into the hospital and packed a few articles of clothing in a bundle, which he put inside the stand by his bed. The letter to Manie he placed in his pocket.

"You ain't going away, are you, Johnny?" asked Wrengell.

"Yes," answered John, "I think I shall."

"Where are you thinking of going?"

"I do not know," answered John.

"I don't believe I'd go," advised Wrengell with the solemnity of a prophet.

John, unheeding the remonstrance, hobbled toward the door.

"Johnny," said Wrengell, following after him, "there's something I want to tell you. There's a fortune in England for the Wrengells. Now, you've got the education, and you can look it up. You're the hope of the family. I'll see you again and tell you all I know about it. You'll look it up, won't you?"

"Perhaps," said John.

"If you get a chance, go and see Dan," said Wrengell as they were passing through the long hall. "Poor fellow, his freedom was swore away. As likely a boy as ever lived."

"Don't waste much time," said Panicky, when the twain had slowly emerged from the hospital. "Time is precious."

"Johnny!" exclaimed Wrengell, as if a valuable idea had suddenly seized him. "I'll go with you. I've become attached to you, and I'm certain you have to me. My eyes are about well, any way."

"I do not think it advisable for you to go," said John.

"I can't see any hurt in it," said Wrengell. "It's been years since I've seen you."

"We don't want you," said Panicky bluntly. "A man of any sense won't urge his company after it's declined."

"Good-bye, Johnny," said Wrengell, with an evil look at the peddler, which intensified John's dislike of him. "Don't forget your uncle."

John and Panicky had gone but a short distance when they were stopped by a call from behind; and turning, they beheld the man from New York and the victim of catarrh walking hurriedly toward them.

"They won't let us keep these bottles," said the catarrhal sufferer, who always spoke with a mournful intonation.

"How can they help themselves?" said Panicky. "This is a free country. Buy what you want and tell other folks it's none of their business.

"But," explained the patient, "they won't give me any medicine if I take this."

"You don't want any of their medicine," said Panicky vehemently. "They can't help you."

"You'll have to take this back as you said you would," firmly declared the New Yorker. "You can't dodge that."

"I don't want to dodge it," replied Panicky. "I always keep my agreement about everything."

"And I'll return mine, too," said the man with the catarrh.

"I hope you'll recover speedily, gentlemen," remarked the peddler, putting the bottles into his pocket and starting off with his satchels.

"Hold on there, you low-lived smouse," cried the indignant New Yorker, "where's my money?"

"I don't keep any account of your finances," said Panicky, again halting. "What money do you mean?"

"Now, this isn't according to the agreement," said the catarrhal victim in the manner which he might have employed to pronounce a funeral oration. "You said we could return the medicine when we wanted to."

"And I kept my agreement," responded the vendor of medicine. "You returned them, and I took them back like a man."

"It don't seem to me as though that's hardly right," said the man with the catarrh in an aggrieved tone.

For a moment the New Yorker was speechless. Then the veins stood out alongside the bunch on his neck and he cried, "Oh, you whelp. If you wasn't right here in the city, I'd smash you fine."

"We expected you would refund the money," said the catarrhal sufferer.

"Now, that would be unreasonable," returned Panicky, "unless there was such an understanding. I said I would take them back, and that's what I've done. I wouldn't wonder if you'd better keep your medicine. It may save your lives," he added, placing the bottles on the sidewalk and leaving his dissatisfied customers.

There was a clink of broken glass. The New Yorker had dyed the paving-stones with Great American Panacea.

"What a waste," remarked Panicky to John. "That might have preserved a human life that just as like as not will be lost now. How lame that horse is. I wonder what is the matter with him?"

Panicky joined John immediately after his repulse by the teamster. His strides were so rapid that his crippled companion was soon left in the rear. "Can't you let out a notch or two?" he said. "We ought to be getting around."

"We could get along faster if we took a more even pace," returned John. "We walk five minutes and stop fifty."

"That can't be helped," said Panicky. "I have got my work to do for the good of my race, and it must be done. Sun, calm, wind, rain, snow or hail, I must travel and give help to the afflicted. When we stop I'll let you have a bottle of the panacea for your foot. I don't like to see a man limp that way."

"Where are you going to take me?" asked John.

"How can you expect me to follow you around when you will not give me the least satisfaction as to what you want of me?"

"Do just as you like about coming," said Panicky. "All I've got to say to you is, if I was in your place, I wouldn't stay away for all the money there is in Ann Arbor. You'll know when you get there. Don't ask me any more questions unless it's fun for you, because I won't answer them."

"It is a very hard thing which you ask," said John, "but I will do as you say. I have a letter to mail at the post-office."

"Come down to the Central depot," said Panicky, handing John a dollar. "Here's something to pay for your ride. I'll go down there now, for I've got business."

After mailing the letter to Manie, John rode to the depot in a hack. The untiring peddler was talking earnestly to a laboring man, who wore a woolen shirt traversed horizontally by alternate stripes of red and squares of red and gray. He sought his customers, John noticed, among the farming and laboring classes, rather than among the rich and aristocratic. He lingered a moment after the arrival of the train, trying to sell a bottle of the panacea to a man who had a cow which had the garget. When he and John were on their way to the westward, he seized every chance to prosecute his business. His attempts to dispose of his wares were made in the absence of the conductor. There was no disease for which he had not a specific, and of which he had not seen and cured a counterpart, differing from it only in location or in being more serious.

John's interest in the route was less intense than when he was going to Ann Arbor. At Barton Junction Manie's friend, Miss Holmes, entered the car in which John was seated. She looked curiously at him, but probably out of consideration for him, did not speak.

Panicky was provokingly reticent to John and voluble to others while they were waiting at Jackson. He would answer no questions, but finally ordered that his charge, who he evidently thought was a necessary encumbrance, should accompany him to the Jackson, Lansing and Saginaw depot.

From this place to the journey's end John hardly looked out of his car window.

"Come on, young man," said Panicky, as they stopped at Lansing.

The surroundings of the depot were far from pleasing. Before it was a willow swamp, which long lumber piles and a manufactory made of brick, which a high, smoke-blackened chimney, did not hide. The richest part of the city, whose roofs and steeples alone were visible, lay to the westward.

Small groups of citizens stood in front of the passenger-house. A pair of trucks with "Phœnix Mills" labeled on the box was passing alongside the railroad track through a cut. From a car on a side-track a good-natured looking man was loading stove-wood into a wagon with a high box, on which was inscribed the name of the commodity which it was designed to carry. A wheeze from the old horse by which the wagon was drawn instantly brought Panicky to the spot.

"How do you do," said the peddler. "Bad cough that horse has."

"Yes," answered the teamster, without stopping his work an instant. "He's got the heaves."

"I know what will fix that in a hurry," said Panicky. "Cobb's Concentrated Carbolic Cough Killer will kill any cough that a horse ever had."

"I don't hardly think I'll buy to-day," said the teamster, as if he disliked to wound the feelings of the patent medicine man.

"If you use it once, you'll never be without it," said the peddler. "Coughs, wheezing, running at the nose, colds, animal influenza, distemper, heaves, none of them can stand before the cough killer."

"It seems to me my brother got some of that for his hoss," said the teamster, still throwing the wood into the wagon.

"Then you've found out it's a grand thing," said Panicky. "Didn't it kill the cough?"

"Well, no, not exactly," returned the teamster, straightening up. "Killed the hoss, though."

"Very lamentable, very," remarked Panicky, as he grabbed his satchels and started southward along the railroad track, followed by John. He had gone but a few rods when he riveted his gaze on a robust appearing fellow who was going toward the main part of the city.

"Must we stop again?" asked John. "Take me to my destination and then sell as much medicine as you like."

"Young man," replied the peddler severely, "you are too narrow-minded. You think the world was made for you and your petty concerns. You must broaden out and get sympathy for humanity."

The track ran through a piece of high ground which descended to the west. The hillside at the east, covered with scraggy brush, stood out in bold relief; but the view at the right was limited, because of its swift descent to the hidden river and the low elevation of the track. Scattered along on the small rises of ground which overlooked the stream, were diminutive cottages, of which a few were painted. Before one of these little buildings a smooth-faced old man wearing a Scotch cap was bent low, cutting stove-wood with a dull buck-saw.

"That's hard business," remarked Panicky.

"There ain't nothin' easy about it," said the wood-sawyer, suspending his work.

"Don't you sometimes get tired?"

"Yes, real. Sometimes I'm purty near played. I used to be so I could stand it tol'able well, but late years I ain't so full o' besum."

"I noticed that before I got anywhere near you."

"You talk as if you knowed!" exclaimed the old man in astonishment.

"I do. You can't fool me much about a man. Don't your back ache some?"

"Yes, yes," said the wood-sawyer, his wonder increasing.

"And when you stoop over, it's a good deal worse; and if you stoop over long, you can't stand it and have to straighten up, and then it'll get better for a while. But in the morning, the day after you've worked hard, it's worse than it is any other time."

"Now if that don't beat anything I ever see! Be you a doctor?"

" No," answered the peddler, " I know more about it than a doctor."

" Do you think it's anything particular ? "

" Yes, it's deficient vigor in the back. Muscles lax, spinal column imperfectly sustained. It will keep getting worse and worse until it finally downs you."

" Danged if I ain't a gittin' worried," said the old man, letting go of his buck-saw. " Don't you s'pose I'll ever cure it ? "

" It ain't at all likely," returned Panicky. " You'll probably be a cripple and linger along for some years. But you mustn't be discouraged. You ought to be ready to die when your time comes."

" I know I orto be ready. But the lingerin', I don't like that 'ere. What 'ud you do for this back bizness if it was on you ? "

" I should cure it, if it was on me."

" I thought you said there wa'n't no cure for it."

" Oh, no, I thought you'd be apt to let it run until there wasn't any hope for you."

" What 'ud you take for it, anyhow ? "

" I should take Great American Panacea and cure it in three weeks."

" Where could a feller git a bottle o' that 'ere stuff ? "

" I've got a bottle I'll sell you for a dollar if you want it."

" Oh, you're a sellin' of it," exclaimed the old man, a light suddenly breaking in on his dull understanding, " I don't believe I want none. Times is hard with me."

" You better take a bottle, Mister," urged Panicky. " You'll never regret it. I knew a man out in Oakland County——"

" I don't want none," said the old man with decision.

" I've been thinking," said Panicky, " if Professor Domnoroff's Elixir of Mercy wouldn't be the thing for you."

" What kind o' stuff is that ? " inquired the old man.

" Grand," answered Panicky, opening a satchel and drawing out a thin bottle of colorless liquid. " It's Spanish medicine, got up by the smartest man there is in all Spain. There you see the directions are in Spanish and English, too."

"I don't want none on it," said the old man.

"Just as like as not, the trouble is in your kidneys," remarked Panicky. "Your complexion looks like it. For kidney disorders there never was anything could hold a candle to Wakefield's Honey of Mullein and Sage."

"I ain't a-hankerin' to take no mullein nor sage," said the old man. "My mother she give me sage tea when I was a little chap, till I got clean degusted with it. I smoked mullein, tryin' to give up tobaccer, an' I ain't crazy for mullein no more. I won't buy no medicine today."

"I know what will cure you," exclaimed the peddler. "You need a bottle of Great Wangamyika Discovery."

"Now, I wouldn't wonder an there was suthin' in that," said the old man, impressed by the peculiar orthography of the name.

"It's a great thing," said Panicky, "and no mistake. There was an African chief, he was a great fellow to fight, and he'd always fight with a club. Once, when he was having a battle with another tribe, he got a lick in the back that about used him up. He couldn't run and he couldn't swing his war-club. That was what bothered him the worst. Every morning he'd get up and see if he couldn't fetch the war-club around, but it wasn't any use. His enemies commenced to press him on every side, and as he couldn't fight, of course his men got whipped. This kept up quite a while, and at last he didn't have much of any territory left. He said if he could only get out himself and fight he could drive them back in short order. He got all the big medicine men in his kingdom to prescribe for him, but his back grew worse, instead of better. By and by he lost his patience entirely, and he said if they didn't relieve him inside of six months, off would go their heads.

"That set 'em to thinking. They come together and consulted. The first thing they done was to take some slaves and lame 'em, as near as they could like the chief. One of 'em practiced up till he could hit the right kind of a wallop every time. The slaves they'd squirm around and yell, but nobody would pay any attention to 'em. The medicine men they fussed and fussed till they got discouraged. They'd think a patient was on the gain, when he'd up and die. They'd try five kinds of medicine, and six, and eight, and twelve. They'd try half of one kind and a twentieth of the rest, and a tenth of three or four and different parts of a lot of others.

"About two weeks before the time was up, one of the slaves got well. They fixed the chief up a few doses of the same stuff, and he was swinging his war-club as well as he ever did. He got so he could throw it in a curve around one of his men and hit an enemy. His back grew so stout that he didn't like a light club any more. He had a heavy one made that nobody else could fetch around in any kind of shape. There never was another such a fellow to shake a war-club in Africa. A week after he was cured he went out against the Maleovajaws, beat 'em and took their king prisoner. He let the medicine men practice up on the prisoners, hitting 'em in the back and curing 'em. He give 'em directions that they should never let anybody know the secret of the medicine. One of 'em did, though, told a missionary when he was dying. The missionary thought folks in this country ought to have it. He went all over Africa to gather the herbs, and sent 'em here. He named it Great Wangamyika discovery."

"This 'ere Great Wanagam cured the chief purty quick, did it?" inquired the old man.

"Yes," answered Panicky, "very quick. There seems to be something about it that's specially good for the back. Affinity they call it for the spinal cord and the vertebrae."

"I'll have a bottle if it busts me," said the old man. "Hand it over."

Panicky instructed his customer how to use the medicine. He must rub it in thoroughly, half of the time stroking downward and half crosswise.

John and his companion soon came in sight of the river; and after crossing the railroad bridge, turned to the right and followed the stream, leaving it, however, when they had reached the next street which led to the left. The houses were here better, and the view in general was correspondingly improved.

"How much farther have we to go?" asked John.

"We're about there now," said Panicky, "that house right ahead."

It was a noble-looking structure which had been indicated by the peddler. Whether the walls were of stone or of brick, John, who knew little of architecture, could not determine. An upright and a wing, on a rise of ground too gradual and low to be called a hill, it was, saving its preponderance of length,

> "A tower of strength that stood four square.
> To all the winds that blew."

One of the most efficient aids in giving it an aspect of majesty was its simplicity. The ornaments which decorate most costly buildings were poorly represented in this edifice. In front of it were evergreens, small and far apart. A path and a drive ran from the street through the yard, the drive winding carelessly up, as if its course had been fixed by unassisted and unrestrained circumstance. As they opened the gate before the path, a man came out into the porch, stood a brief space of time, and answered some questions which were addressed to him from within. In the twilight, which was fast settling, John could see nothing of him but the outline of his form.

"I'm going back," said Panicky hurriedly. "You can find your way. Go up there and knock."

The man in the porch walked swiftly out to meet John. When he left the shadow of the house, his identity was no longer doubtful; he was Durgenson.

"Helloa, Wrengell," he said. "So you've come here, have you?"

"Did you not send for me?" asked John.

"Certainly," responded Durgenson. "But I'm awful busy just now. You go to number one hundred and nine —— Street. Tell the man you want to stay all night. I'll be up there in from one to three hours. Don't go out in the street, because I'm in a hurry and want to find you there when I come. I mean business. I'll make your fortune."

"Is that all you want of me," asked John in disappointment, "to buy cattle and horses? I thought you had found something which would give me respectability."

"So I have," said Durgenson. "So I have. I'll satisfy you on that point to-night. I can't explain now. I'm in a great hurry."

A woman rushed from the porch and interrupted John in his departure.

"Stop," she cried. "I want to see you."

"Maybe you'd better go in," said Durgenson.

The woman led John through a hall, through another room and into a smaller apartment, in which she left him.

"Stay here a moment," she said, locking the door as she went.

On ordinary occasions John would have been quick to rebel against a curtailment of his liberty, but he was now so anxious to hear the expected revelation that he submitted with good grace.

"This way," said the woman, again peering into the room.

John, with his expectations aroused to the highest pitch, went up a flight of stairs and into a small room as his guide indicated.

"Wait here until I call for you," said the woman, turning the key in the lock.

The house was still, and the room, lighted only by one window, was comparatively dark. As time passed curiosity gave place to loneliness, and loneliness to unrest.

John's dissatisfaction with his quarters increased. Mrs. Boyle's neglected warning to avoid Durgenson, coupled with the suspicious conduct of the woman who had conducted him to the chamber, intensified his sense of insecurity.

While he was deliberating whether to cry out and demand release, or to attempt an escape from the window, there came from below a voice, which, low but resonant, filled him with a singular awe.

"Has the Suebian come?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

AWAKENING.

RATKE was in no great pain, physical or mental, as Manie led him from the scene of the fire. The repeated blows which he had received had deadened sensation, and he had neither concern for the present nor anxiety for the future. At intervals he passed his palm across his brow, generally repeating the act before he dropped his hand.

His face and hands were blistered in places, and his hair adhered to his head in singed clusters, his eyes were inflamed, and the lashes burned nearly off.

"You are badly burned, Uncle James," said Manie, who was crying. "How it must hurt you."

"No," answered the major, "I am past suffering. All that can hurt me is thinking. Sluggishness has come to my relief. Do not make me talk or think."

Jake Sheppard's house was a small, one story building, which lay between the church and the Ratke farm. Back of it was a log stable, and east of it a diminutive shop in which its previous owner, a blacksmith, had worked. When it was reached by the Ratkes, some chairs were already in it, and dishes and furniture were approaching near by in a wagon.

Manie went to the residence of Holmes for remedies to apply to her uncle's burned face and hands. She bathed them in oil and arranged a shade for his eyes. He did not seem to appreciate her kindness, although he submited to it without a word of opposition or comment.

"Miss Grippin," said Daggett, coming to the back door of their new residence, "the men all want to do something for you. We're going to get up a pile of wood. If anybody else offers you any wood, you tell 'em you've got enough already spoke for, will you ?"

"I will," returned Mrs. Grippin. "Thank you, Mark."

Daggett retreated a few steps, and motioned Mrs. Grippin to follow him. "How is he?" he asked, pointing toward the room where the major was.

"I'm afraid he will never be any better," said Mrs.Grippin. "He is losing his mind. He don't realize much of anything that is going on. He can understand when we talk right to him, but if we don't, he wont pay any attention."

"Boys," said Daggett, as he joined his fellow-workmen, who were in front of the house, "you go over to the woods. I'll skip up and see Miss Green. I know she'll sell me a tree or two."

Daggett purchased three fallen trees of Mrs. Green and proceeded across to the woods, which were in sight of the smouldering farmhouse which was now deserted by spectators.

"This won't be a quarter enough," he said to Sheppard. "We can buy the rest of some one else cheaper than we can of her, though."

The men worked with a will, as though to atone for their neglect of duty while in the major's service. Strange to say, the most active and efficient of them all was Archer. He pulled an end of a cross-cut saw with such energy that Daggett, Sheppard and Brown were successively obliged to desist from working with him.

"You chop, Will," said Daggett, "there can't no man saw with you."

Archer snatched an ax and hurried to the top of the tree, where he struck off limb after limb, trimmed them and chopped them into stove-wood with astonishing rapidity.

"What's Phleet Takum a pokin' round that fire for?" said Jake.

Philetus stood by the edge of the ruins which marked the site of Ratke's dwelling. He had a rake with which he reached as far as possible, systematically dragging the ashes and bringing to him whatever he could conveniently pull. A pack of dogs was scouring about the yard.

"Git out o' that, you thief," yelled Jake. Immediately after, the men in chorus set up a prolonged yell. The startled Takum, followed by his dogs, made swiftly for the woods, and he was not seen again by his neighbors for two days.

"My faithful men," said the major after the wood was hauled, "my faithful men, and I did not even thank them." For a week he mourned that he had not expressed to them his gratitude.

Let us pause in our account of Ratke's experience to note some events in the history of the neighborhood which is connected with our narrative.

Sparks, who had offered a considerable reward for the recovery of Madge T. was rejoiced when a detective found his property in New York. He was soon in possession of the valuable beast, the speed of which he took special pains to improve.

Nora, whose singular demeanor at any other time would have been commented upon, declared that she could not longer stay in Jefferson. A few days after the family was settled in Sheppard's house, she went to live with her aunt in Ohio.

The day after the fire a telegram for Montcalm came to Break o' Day, stating that his mother was dead and naming the date of her funeral. In the burying-ground by Green's orchard they placed the son in whom she had trusted.

Could he have arisen from his resting-place and stood upright, he might have viewed the house in which he had lost his peace of mind and his hope of eternity. Had he taken two steps, he would have been above the body of his victim. If withdrawing his gaze from the spot beneath which lay the disfigured forehead and cloven brain, he had turned it to the right, it would have rested on the cottage which sheltered Ratke, whose lethargic, nearly-demented condition of mind he had helped to produce.

One night Jake Sheppard, who was something of a hunter, was cooning in Mrs. Green's woods when he was guided by his dog to a tree which had a large hollow. Ordinarily Jake was a model citizen, but in his nocturnal hunts he was not a rigid respecter of the law. He procured an ax and chopped down the tree as speedily as possible, that he might secure the game before his unwarranted cutting of the timber was discovered. As the fall of the tree did not frighten the coon from his refuge, Jake cut into the body, which in that place was but a shell. He was both surprised and chagrined when the ax struck a metallic substance which took from it a deep nick.

"What blamed fool has been a-stuffin' an auger in here?" he exclaimed, pulling the designated tool from its place of secretion. His astonishment increased as he drew out some clothes and, lastly, a long pocket-book, which, upon examination, he saw contained a large roll of bills. He thought at once of the robbery in July, and, forgetting the coon, started for Mrs. Green's house. Owing to the deafness of Mrs. Green and the timidity of William Henry Harrison, who never quite recovered from his terror of the midnight visitor by whom his master had been slain, Sheppard was some time in securing an answer to his knocks and calls. Mrs. Green, however, was at last aroused by the half-wit, who broke the fastening to her bedroom door and entered her room for protection. Jake went to her window, made known his errand, and was admitted to the house. The only reward which he received from the widow was forgiveness for his depredation in her timber. Shortly after this event he called at the cottage by the church and left an envelope directed to the major. The envelope contained fifty dollars in currency and a badly spelled note which stated that Sheppard was going away from the neighborhood and begged that Ratke would accept the money as a token of regard.

The major rallied in part from the stupor which chained him in the few days succeeding the fire. He made an auction and sold his personal property. When Taylor was taken away by a Jackson horseman, who bought him for four hundred dollars, Ratke with sadness watched the handsome animal, trotting behind the owner's sulky as he was led up the road. He paid first his hired men, with the exception of Sheppard, who could not be found. The remainder of his money he distributed among his creditors, who were numerous. Most of them were content to allow him time for his fortunes to mend, but a few gave warning that, unless payment was speedily made, they would cause him trouble. This insulting language revived a portion of his old-time spirit. He wrote them letters, stating his intention to liquidate every dollar of his indebtedness, but affirming his resolution not to pay a cent of costs for legal proceedings. "Those who would be first," he said, "should be last."

Ratke sought work and found it.[1]

His former hired men saw him coming home night after night, stoop-shouldered and listless. They took a job of grubbing from Holmes for twelve dollars and told him to let it to Ratke for twenty, and they would make up the difference to him. They instructed him also to say nothing of their connection with the affair to Ratke, who, should he be made aware of it, would be certain to refuse the charity. The major accepted Holmes's offer and labored with all his strength at the grubbing.

Manie, on applying in several districts for a position as teacher, found that the fall terms of country schools were almost invariably conducted by those who had been engaged in the spring. She then obtained a place to work in the family of Osborne.

The habits of Ratke had changed with the circumstances which surrounded him. He was silent, but apparently not thoughtful. No longer in his moments of leisure did he sit with his left leg thrown over the arm of his rocking-chair, his chin resting on his hand, and his elbow on his knee. No longer did he speculate or philosophize. He seemed to be again sinking, with his grief forgotten, into a gradual and peaceful decline. When he talked, which was seldom, it was concerning business matters; and his former force of delivery was entirely wanting. All that seemed to attract his special notice was the absence of Manie, who came home every Saturday night and remained until Monday morning. He would sometimes ask what day of the week it was, and on receiving an answer would sit silent some minutes and then repeat his question. Mrs. Grippin, who feared that he was going into insanity or idiotcy, longed to hear again the tiresome theories which she had once detested. With the hope of seeing him once more at his studies, she borrowed a work on physics and some scientific journals, which she placed where she imagined they would come under his observation, but her ruse was unavailing. He did not notice them until they were alluded to by his sister, when he picked them up, apparently without interest, and threw them down with a sigh.

Manie, although she was obliged to do all the work in the family of Osborne, who had seven children and one hired man, on being informed of her uncle's dangerous apathy came home every night and returned in the morning. Ratke showed the first pleasure which he had exhibited for weeks. No matter how tired he was, when he had finished his toil for the day, he walked up the road to meet her. His object was not to talk, nor did it seem to be to hear her, for he was an indifferent listener. Satisfied with her presence, he desired no exchange of words. His instinct to be near her was like that of the dog which silently follows his master, or that of the dying horse which, when turned loose that he may have room to struggle, totters back to breathe his last in his familiar stall. Years before, he had told her stories while she had sat on his knee and combed his hair. Now he had childishly asked her to do again as she had done then. She humored his whim, and it was seldom that he had to remind her of his wish.

Mrs. Green, who waited until after seeding to thresh her grain, one day dispatched William Henry Harrison to secure Ratke's assistance. The next morning the major with his pitchfork appeared early at the house of his old enemy. He was given a place on the bundle stack, but through the intervention of his friend, Jim Turner, he was allowed the easy duty of holding bags. At noon Jim was obliged to leave on account of a previous promise which he had made to Osborne.

William Henry Harrison, Sparks and Wingscheut were on the straw-stack. Throughout the forenoon the half-wit had worked by the carrier, in the language of Wingscheut, "vith his mouth vite open ketchin, all te chaff." After dinner the major noticed the poor fellow toiling away in the same uncomfortable place. "Sparks," he shouted, "why don't you go up and change with him?"

"I don't have to," replied Sparks.

"Come down here, William Henry Harrison," called Ratke, "I will change with you. You can hold bags."

The major took the position which had been occupied by the half-wit, who slid down the stack and was buried in the litterings at the bottom, from which he soon emerged. Sparks motioned to the feeder, with whom, on the night of the expedition to Wallace's, the major had quarreled over the disposition of the horse-thieves in case they were captured. The driver, in turn, received the signal from the feeder, the horses bent their heads and tugged, the machine sang more loudly, and every man about it bestirred himself anew. The straw rolled in great masses up the carrier, to the head of which a suffocating cloud of dust was borne by the wind.

The major, whose temper and dignity were aroused, stood at his post, too proud to ask for relief. The straw gathered in a wall behind him, and Wingscheut lazily or purposely let it fall back, so that he was obliged to pitch back large quantities of it the second time. At each one of the huge forkfuls which he had to take his body trembled, and he wondered how much longer he could endure the strain. Most of the hands were busily occupied, and those who were not bestowed little sympathy on the old man in his weakness so heroically and pitifully trying to keep up an appearance of strength. He was at the point of exhaustion, when the threshing was finished and the machine suspended motion. Without waiting for his supper or his coat and vest, which, of course, he had stripped off, he went away from the barn-yard, his breathing difficult, his eyes blinded and his face blackened with dirt.

"Guess Jerusalem got about enough," said the Oakville man, loud enough for Ratke to hear. "I ain't sorry neither. It ain't any worse for him to work than it is for me."

"This ain't makin' wagons," remarked Sparks.

The words rankled deep in the major's breast, as with his pitchfork on his shoulder he went slowly home. He was hurt most by the grim satisfaction with which Sparks spoke of his downfall. On his farm, surrounded by his books and his inventions, he could smile at ridicule;

but now, removed from his defenses, he could not endure it.

Mrs. Grippin had gone to visit Mrs. Boyle, with whom she expected to stay that night. Manie, who had finished her work for Osborne, received her uncle with expressions of pity. She brought some water and washed the dirt from his face and neck. While she was combing the chaff from his hair, a constable came to serve a summons on him in behalf of the Empire Machine Company.

"The completion of disgrace," said Ratke, after the man had gone. "I cannot pay them. Judgment will be rendered against me, and I must have it thrown in my teeth that my promises are lies. How much more! Oh, God, how much more can I endure!"

"Let me comb the chaff from your hair," said Manie.

"No," answered the major, taking his hat and going out of the house. He went straight to the little blacksmith shop and stood before it. The sun, now a reddish ball, stripped of its fiery spikes, seemed lying in a slight depression of the landscape, as if it had rolled thither from one of the declivities between which it rested. Its latest rays were permitted to fall on Ratke by the parting of a strip of cloud, which was drawn asunder like curtains on a stage. The major's gaze rested longest on the buildings which had been erected on his former farm. The windows of the house threw back among the apple trees, by which it was partly hidden, the rays of the sun, whose splendid reflections glimmered like wondrous lanterns among the branches. From Green's woods, which were red and yellow in the cloak of fall, came the voice of William Henry Harrison, who was calling the cows. A night-hawk swept high over the major's head, carrying its mournful cry over his desolated and rebuilded homestead.

He opened the door of the shop and entered. Inside were a few tools which had been left by the blacksmith who had previously owned the lot. These were a workbench, an anvil, two saw-horses and two hammers. The blacksmith evidently had worked some in wood; and, in fact, such was the case, for he had been exorbitant in his charges, and his trade afforded him but a meager subsistence. On the workbench was Ratke's one-man saw, which was badly rusted. Taking a hammer, the major loosened the saw-blade from the frame and fastened it with a strap to a strong hickory pole, the upper part of which he nailed firmly to the wall. He tied a small rope to the other end of the saw and pulling it until the stiff pole bent far back, he made it fast to a ring in the opposite wall, leaving the saw stretched horizontally within about two feet of the floor. His next movement was to place nearly under the saw a saw-horse on which he rested his head so that his throat was within a few inches of the sharp saw-teeth. Satisfied that the arrangements for suicide were complete, he arose to take his farewell of terrestrial things.

Once more he stepped out into the cool evening air. The sun had disappeared, and its light had ceased to tint the clouds along the western horizon, but it was reflected from the stray patches which were moving slowly near the zenith.

" Ah," he said, " the cloud at the horizon is as red as the one at the zenith. It does not appear so to me, because I am not in a proper position to see its brilliancy. If the light of merit has fallen on me and my inventions, the world has not been in a situation to recognize it."

To no purpose had his philosophy been neglected; at the last hour it persistently returned, demanding that he should harbor it for a brief space before he and it took their final separation. It mingled with his every observation; it asserted itself in the arrangement of the machine for his destruction.

He prepared for a last look at earth, which twilight was plunging in partial obscurity.

" Oh, Trace, Trace ! " he exclaimed, as his eyes fell on the graveyard, " why did you shatter my faith in you ? It was you that first broke my old heart, and it has been cracking and crumbling ever since. I would I were with you, and Nature, not my hand, had sent me there."

Resolutely he went inside the shop. He would see no more the fair landscape in its autumnal beauty; he was hearing for the last time the night-hawk, the solemn notes of which were a fitting preliminary to the approaching tragedy. In the morning, or, perhaps, that night, they would find him with his throat hacked and, it might be, entirely cut in twain. He crawled under the saw and rested his head on the saw-horse. He raised a scythe to strike a blow which would allow the hickory spring to pull the saw across his throat.

Some one jerked him back, tipping over the saw-horse. Manie's arms were about his neck, her face close to his, her soothing voice in his ear. After pulling him gently away she struck the rope with the scythe. The vicious force with which the spring propelled the saw showed how deadly an implement of destruction the major had planned.

"What made you interrupt me?" cried the major. "The world has no use for James Ratke! Wherever I am, I am in the way. I am refuse in the economy of Nature, refuse which her creatures abhor, but which she will not remove. I will remove myself! Go away, Manie! Go away, I tell you!"

"Uncle James, Uncle James," pleaded Manie, "do not act so! Come into the house."

"You, too, have become my enemy," said Ratke. "No friend of mine would like to prolong my wretched existence. I thought that I had suffered until I had no further capacity for suffering, but sensation only slept. It racks me now as it racked me before my mind fell into torpidity, when I sat on the log watching my burning wagon. Oh, Manie! Must I, must I fall into that stupor again? Must I, my God! Must I see my mind, like my fortunes, waste away, leaving me a wreck and a wretch indeed?"

"Trust in God," said Manie. "He can rescue you from any trouble."

"God!" echoed the major, "God has deserted me utterly; utterly, utterly," he added with an accent of incescribable despair. "Where is my farm on which I prided myself? Where are my horses and cattle? Where are my books, which were my study and my comfort? Where are my inventions, which I would have given my life to save? Where is Trace, the trusted son of my comrade, whom I loved better than myself? His mutilated body is in that graveyard! He died in destroying my all! If I could forget! If I only could! 'The waters are come in unto my soul.'"

"Come in," said Manie, pulling him toward the door.

The major went passively to the house, where Manie induced him to be seated. "'The Lord will not cast off forever,'" she said, "'but, though he cause grief yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies.'"

"You talk of consolation," replied Ratke, rising from his chair and striding restlessly about the room. "There is no consolation for me. 'The sorrows of death compass me.' I will not take my wretched life to-night, because I could take only the bodily part. I would I could place those saw teeth against my soul! I would annihilate myself, for I could meet annihilation firmly. This old body I can bring to the grave, but I cannot touch the after life. No. I must keep this sensation, sensation which gives me no pleasure, only pain, eternal pain. I am like an old harp which was once an instrument of melody, but which now yields the harshest of sounds. Mirth, pleasure, rest, they are for me neither now nor in eternity!"

"You have no reason to be so hopeless," said Manie. "God has promised to help those who trust in Him. 'Whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely and shall be quiet from fear of evil.'

"'He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hid his face from him. But when he cried unto Him, He heard.'"

"What have I rendered unto Him in my prosperity," said Ratke, "that He should help me now? I never openly acknowledged Him. When wealth and friends were mine, I depended on my own resources with little solicitude for God's assistance. I said, 'I will get wisdom;' and that wisdom I worshipped. Now, when all my persecutors have overtaken me between the straights, he has left me to be extricated by my wisdom."

"You have fulfilled part of the Lord's requirements," said Manie. "'Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house, when thou seest the naked that thou cover him?' "

"It was not enough," answered the major, "or I should have support in this hour. He laughs at my calamity. 'He hath thrown down and hath not pitied.' 'He hath made me desolate and faint all the day.' I might call, but he would not answer. Oh, Manie, how can I live? 'My heart is like wax!' "

"You will feel better to-morrow," said Manie. "When I am teaching school, we shall have more money. We will pay up these little debts, and how much comfort we will take, reading our books and studying together. We will get some tools in the shop for you, Uncle James, and you can work at your inventions as you used to do."

"I shall never know comfort again," said Ratke. "Is it nothing to lose one's entire possessions, to see perishing what one prizes more than property, to see wealth, position, friendships, aspirations, all shivered in succession, and the ruins heaped in ashes on one's head? My neighbors who have given me financial help laugh at me. They sneer at my Jerusalem wagon and crack jokes about my one-man saw. I cannot endure it. I shall die or go insane. 'The pains of hell have got hold upon me.' "

" 'The sorrows of hell compassed me about,' " said Manie. " 'The snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called on the Lord and my cry came before him, even unto his ears.' "

"My sighs are many, and my heart is faint," said the major. "There is anguish in reflection. Lure me into forgetfulness by song, Manie."

"Shall I sing one which John composed?" asked Manie.

"Anything," answered Ratke. "Sit close by me."

The room was quite dark, for Manie had not yet lighted a lamp. She seated herself by Ratke, who had ceased his violent pacing of the floor. The scene through which she had passed put a tremulous pathos into her voice.

"A minstrel sang often Euterpa's gay song
Where the board of the feast was outspread,
Where the floor of the hall 'neath a great courtly throng
Bent and swayed to the dancers' light tread.
Sweet notes which were welcomed, applauded and famed
Came from the musicians' skilled art.
Their melody all except pleasure disclaimed;
It mixed with the revel where mirth was untamed,
But it touched not a comfortless heart.

'His fame and his fortune all perished away.
Those who in his prosperous days
Were loudest in flattery scoffed at his lay,
And hushed was their liberal praise.
He thought of his laurels, whose life was so brief,
In his gloomy and utter despair
No hand was extended to give him relief.
'My burden,' he faltered, in accents of grief,
'Is greater than I can bear.'

"He bowed low his head and he threw down his lyre
In a hall where its music had rung,
He felt that forever had left him that fire
With which in his youth he had sung.
Oh, deep was the anguish that swept o'er him then
When no solace his broken heart propped;
He mused on his trouble, remote from all men;
But mournfully from its mute corner again
He picked up the lyre he had dropped.

"Out on the wide world the sad measure was borne,
And the healing of pain was its goal.
It came from a bosom by misery torn;
It raised many a low-smitten soul.
Then woe left its sack-cloth forgotten and smiled;
The transgressor bent on his knee;
And men from the shades of their crimes were beguiled;
'Lord, now it is plain,' said the minstrel, a child;
'I know why Thou chastenest me.'"

"Comb my hair, Manie," said the major. "Sit on my knee and comb my hair. Let me think that these are the olden days, that you are a little girl, that I have not lost my place, that I still have hope for my inventions. Oh, this is luxury! What a soothing power there is in the comb."

Manie, who was crying under cover of the darkness, tenderly combed and brushed his hair.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LIBER SEXTUS.

THE voice which John heard was silent after its one outburst. He could find for the words no logical connection with any present event. An inquiry in the nineteeth century concerning an individual of an ancient German nation was a circumstance which he could not understand. It might be a quotation which some one was reciting in a tragical manner or the exclamation of a lunatic whose bewildered faculties were roaming through European barbaric history. The latter supposition seemed the more likely, for a practicing declaimer would not content himself with the repetition of a single sentence.

John presently heard the tones of a female in the lower part of the house who was complaining bitterly of some grievance. "I tell you I won't," she cried. "I won't have them here, so many of them, without letting them know they ain't welcome. This is my house, or as good as my house, and you needn't say a word more about it."

John began to feel positive alarm. He mistrusted that Durgenson had entrapped him into a mad-house, for what purpose he could not decide. He knew, however, on reflection that if it were a public institution, he could demonstrate his sanity, when he would at once be set free. But if it were not a refuge for the insane, what meant the strange language, especially that sonorous voice which had so startled him.

To satisfy himself that he was not a prisoner he went to the one window of the room, which he endeavored to open, but which resisted his efforts. The blinds were closed and fastened, he did not doubt, in such a manner as to defy anything less than a great expenditure of force.

He did not yet desire an escape ardently enough to shatter the window and the blinds. There was probably no way of descent to the ground, except by leaping; and in case he failed to find a reasonably safe method of exit, the violence he contemplated would bring him disagreeable consequences, whether he were in the hands of friends or of enemies. Notwithstanding its disadvantages he would in all likelihood have attempted a flight from the window, had he not still clung to the hope of realizing some benefit from his visit. Panicky had told him he could not afford to stay away from this place for all the wealth in Ann Arbor,

He seated himself in a chair and waited. Footsteps, evidently those of a woman, were ascending the stairs. A key turned in the lock of the door, which opened, and a light shone into the room.

"Come this way," authoritatively said the woman who had conducted him to the chamber.

"Very well," answered John, "but before you lock me up again as if I were a convict, I wish to know what I have done to merit such treatment. I am used to being my own master."

"Excuse me if I have appeared rude," said the woman. "What I have done, I have done for your good. You will acknowledge it to-morrow. Do as I tell you, and I will soon explain everything to your satisfaction."

This speech, though it silenced John and partly quieted his displeasure, was said in a manner not in the least apologetic.

Not far from the bottom of the stairs she opened a door at the left, which she requested John to enter. After placing the lamp on the desk she said, much as she would address a child, "Be patient a few minutes more. You will find it to your advantage to do as you are directed."

John expected that when she left him this time she would omit her precaution of locking the door, but in this he was mistaken. He was in a library which faced the street, and had closely-packed shelves on three of its walls. The room was plainly, almost shabbily furnished, but the books were arranged with method. One set of shelves was devoted to history and biography, another to theoretical and miscellaneous works, and the third contained, besides such as were included in the second, poetry and light literature. In the historical department the works of ancient nations were at the bottom and the chronology of the subject matter in each volume was more modern than that in the book underneath it. The bottom shelves of the theoretical and miscellaneous department were occupied by books of reference, such as dictionaries, cyclopedias, etc. Above them, in order, were religious, philosophical and political treatises and various odd and antiquated dissertations. The legal and political works occupied the greater number of the shelves in the theoretical division, and usurped more than half the space in the third department. The imaginative literature, alone, of all the library, showed signs of disarrangement. Poems and novels were mingled in confusion. Scott's Waverlies were scattered about on every shelf. It was as if the library had been once arranged by a careful student, and afterward abandoned to some slovenly, trivial-minded person, who had left the solid part undisturbed. The one wall which did not support book-shelves was pasted over with newspaper clippings, which were mostly political articles or items concerning distinguished men. On this side of the apartment was a secretary divided into small drawers, some of whose labels are here quoted: "War Measures," "Reconstruction," "Currency."

A step close to the door and a suspension of the sound notified John that some person was near him.

"Say," began John, "how much longer am I to stay in here?"

"How do I know?" said Durgenson. "I didn't put you in there."

"But you sent for me to come here," returned John. "I have been abused. That woman has a fashion of locking the door every time she leaves me. I will not endure it much longer. You must inform me soon what you wish of me, or I will kick out the window and go."

"I don't blame you a bit," said Durgenson. "That's just what I'd do if I was in your place. That woman is a little out of her head. That's what makes her act so.

She's making game of you. I didn't want you to stop here, you remember. If you'd gone up town as I asked you to, I'd have been telling you what you wanted to know by this time. I'd slam through the window and light out. I wouldn't let anybody interfere with my liberty. You go up there where I said, and I'll be up directly."

As footsteps in an adjoining room drew near, Durgenson quickly retreated. The key turned, the door opened and the woman entered, followed by another lady, at sight of whom John sprang to his feet with an exclamation of joy.

"Why, Mrs. Boyle!" cried John, shaking the hand of the newcomer. "You do not know how glad I am to see you!"

"He has been very suspicious of me ever since he came here," said Mrs. Boyle's companion. "He thought I meant to do him some harm."

"Afraid of Mrs. Baldwin?" said Mrs. Boyle. "You needn't be, John. Do whatever she tells you to and don't be afraid of the consequences."

"I will trust any one whom you recommend," said John. "Pardon my impatience, but I am very anxious to know why Mr. Durgenson sent for me."

"Mr. Durgenson did not send for you," replied Mrs. Baldwin.

"He said he did," returned John. "He said he knew something to my advantage which he wished to tell me. He instructed me to go to No. 109 —— Street, where we would hold a consultation."

"He wanted to get you away," said Mrs. Baldwin. "I know his tricks. That is why I locked the door when I left you."

"Will you tell me one thing," asked John, "what is the meaning of those strange cries which I heard?"

"In good time," answered Mrs. Baldwin. "Before I explain much to you, you must answer some questions. Where were you brought up?"

"The first that I can remember," replied John, "I lived with a man named Norris in the township of Terry, Branch County. He took me from the poor-house. I cannot remember my father or my mother."

"We have made careful inquiries about you," said Mrs. Baldwin, "and we are satisfied that we know your family history. Will you please bare your foot? Which one, Mrs. Boyle?"

"That one," said Mrs. Boyle, pointing to the left one.

"It is very sore," returned John. "I have had a surgical operation performed on it. Still, I will do as you say."

"What kind of operation?" asked Mrs. Baldwin.

"There were six toes," replied John, "and I had one of them amputated."

"What," cried Mrs. Baldwin, "amputated? You foolish boy! Do you know you have lost the most honorable birth-mark there is in Michigan? What are we to do, now that the proof of your descent is gone? You saw it, though, Mrs. Boyle?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Boyle. "I will swear to that."

"The doctors at Ann Arbor will testify to the same thing," said John, "and the scar where the toe was will always stay on my foot."

"I will tell you some things which, perhaps, you would like to know," said Mrs. Baldwin, as John was replacing the bandages on his foot. "Your grandfather was a man of wealth and influence."

"Is he dead?" asked John excitedly.

"You must not interrupt me," said Mrs. Baldwin. "Your mother went to Detroit to school, and while there became acquainted with a young German named Lehmann. Mr. Lehmann and your grandfather, meeting accidentally, quarreled over politics. Your grandfather, on finding out that the young gentleman who wished to marry his daughter, was the one with whom he had disagreed, told him never to enter his house. A while after that your mother, in spite of the quarrel, married Mr. Lehmann. Your grandfather was, of course, very indignant, and they were never reconciled. Your parents went to Chicago to live. Your father, who was talented and highly educated, gave music lessons. They claim he had real musical genius. A concert which he gave won high praise from the Chicago papers. Shortly after this your father and mother started to go to Milwaukee, where he was advertised to play. Both of them were killed in the accident which happened to the train. Not much notice was taken of your father's death at the time, but six months afterward some of his compositions became famous. People from all parts of the country visit his grave to pay tribute to his memory. If you are familiar with the history of music, you have heard part of my story before."

"Yes," said John, "I have played my father's marches and felt my soul quiver to the emotions they produced, but I never suspected my relationship to their author."

"You," continued Mrs. Baldwin, "or we think it was you, their child, was left during their absence with Mrs. Boyle, who kept with her another boy named Wrengell. After the accident Mr. Durgenson, who married your mother's cousin, came to Mrs. Boyle and saying that he and Mr. Lehmann had been friends, offered to care for you, but he did not state that you were relatives. Mrs. Boyle had become attached to you, and she declined to let you go. She said Mr. Lehmann had left you with her, and she felt justified in keeping you. You were not quite two years old then. One night, when you and the other little boy, who was older than you, had been playing in the kitchen and running out doors, Mr. Boyle missed you. She asked the boy where you were, and he told her that you had gone out doors. Thinking it queer that you, a child, who would naturally be afraid in the dark, should stay so long she went out and called you. She was worried when you did not answer. She called the neighbors and roused the police, but she could not find you. A man named Dabney had been sawing wood in a yard close by."

"What," exclaimed John, "not Panicky!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Baldwin. "He goes by the name of Panicky. He had coaxed you to him and given you some candy. Mrs. Boyle visited his house the next morning and did not find him at home. Late in the day she saw him, when she asked him if he had seen you. He answered that he had not seen you for two days. Mrs. Boyle always believed that he had a hand in kidnapping you.

"She moved to Michigan. A few weeks ago you came to her house, and she was struck by your strong resemblance to your father. When you played on your violin, she was almost certain of your identity. Remembering how Mr. Durgenson had tried to get possession of you twenty years before, she warned you to have nothing to do with him. After you sprained your ankle and she saw your foot, she was certain who you were.

"Your grandfather met with an accident in Jackson County, when the story of your mother's elopement was again told through the country. Mrs. Boyle, hearing it, wrote to us what she knew about the affair. I got a lawyer to interview Dabney. The lawyer frightened him into telling that it was he who took you from Mrs. Boyle. He says Mr. Durgenson hired him to kill you. He did not want to do that, but he was in sore need of money, and he did take you to his brother's house out in the country, where you were kept for several weeks, Durgenson all the while believing you dead. If you had been a rich man's son, you would have been found. As it was, the police took little pains to hunt you up. In a little while Dabney, who was careful that you should not be hurt, took you to Michigan and left you with a relative of the boy who was living with Mrs. Boyle. That is the way you came by your name of Wrengell."

"Then," remarked John, "the history of which I have been so much ashamed is the history of Alf, the fellow who was with Mrs. Boyle. I have hung my head for the depravity of his parents." He felt a great thrill of thankfulness as he reflected that Wrengell, his tormentor at Ann Arbor, with his sand-colored coat, his wicked mouth and his criminal face was not his relative.

"We told Dabney," said Mrs. Baldwin, "that if he would find you and identify you, we would pardon him for what he had done and reward him besides. He was glad to repair the mischief he had accomplished. He said he had seen you but a short time before, and he could soon find you. You know how he kept his word."

"Who was my grandfather?" asked John.

"I will show you his picture," replied Mrs. Baldwin. "Come into this room."

They passed into an apartment which was well, though not luxuriously, furnished. Mrs. Baldwin pointed to a frame, which enclosed the stern, intellectual face of Senator Mallard. John felt his legs tremble and his heart throb. Sinking into a chair, incapable of speech, he covered his face with his hands, while the tears trickled through his fingers and ran down his coat-sleeves. Poverty and disgrace, where were they now? Of his wealth he knew nothing and cared little, but his lineage was proud enough to satisfy even his ambition.

"Let me see him," he said in a broken voice. "I want to see my grandfather."

"We will go to him now," said Mrs. Baldwin. "He was thrown from a buggy in Jackson County, and he cannot recover. His reason is gone."

They crossed to the opposite side of the house and entered a bedroom. The old statesman, with his face turned toward the door, his head toward the window, was lying on the bed at the right. He was weakened by sickness, but there was a vigor in the expression of his countenance which seemed an unnatural accompaniment of its pallor and emaciation.

"Thou art a Suebian," he said, looking fixedly at John. "I know thee by thy lofty stature, thy blue eyes and light hair."

Durgenson came in quietly and stood by the bed.

The old man, suddenly raising himself, pointed his finger at the cattle-buyer. "Quosque tandem abutere Durgenson patientia nostra!" he exclaimed, in a tone which made Durgenson draw back. "And didst thou, Roman, think thyself able to drive the Suebian from his home? Sueborun gens est longe maxima et bellicosissima Germanorum omnium. No, Roman, thou canst not do it. The days of Varus are come, but Varus cannot restore to thee thy legions."

"He's awful crazy," whispered Durgenson to John.

"Roman," cried Mallard, with astonishing force for one in his weakened condition, "leave the country of the Suebi."

"I don't believe he wants me here," said Durgenson, quitting the bedroom, "I guess I'd better go."

Mrs. Baldwin followed Durgenson.

"Suebian," said Mallard, "I have the key to the past. For years I tried in vain to master its secrets. Now they come to me without any effort on my part. Time, you know, circles around us and every year draws a coil. My head has whirled and unwound the coil, unwound two thousand years. I have learned every incident in the history of the Suebi, incidents to which historians have never referred."

"Here is a violin," said Mrs. Baldwin, as she approached with the instrument which she named. "Play for your grandfather."

When John's music had ceased, Mallard said, "I hear Orpheus playing on his golden harp to win Eurydice from the king of the dead. Cerberus has sunk to sleep, and the fiery wheel on which Ixion is bound stands still. No, my head has whirled and carried me back too far. That strain never floated in the land of the dead or over the Thessalian hills. Thou art a Suebian."

"The rigor of thy clime hath saddened thee," said the old man at the conclusion of another air by John. "This is the wail of the terrible north wind, lying flat on his face and piling mountains of ice on thy desolate islands and across the mouths of thy slow rivers. Thou couldst not translate his language until he drove mirth from thee."

By Mrs. Baldwin's direction John again took his bow and played.

"Strange things are in thy forest of Bacinis," said Mallard. "In thy wanderings through the wood thou hast seen visions of the unattainable and hast overtaken the sublime. I, too, have seen sublimity, but I could not catch it. I thought to grapple it and hold it up to the gaze of men, and, when I reached out my hand for it, it was gone. Give it to me, that I may unfold it before the senate."

"You have already unfolded it before the senate a hundred times," replied John.

"No," said Mallard sadly. "I fear I may not get it. It is not of earth and is vaster than earth. Words narrow it and imprison it, and I have no expression but words. Martha, there are feathers in this bed, for I smell them."

"No," answered Mrs. Baldwin, "of course there are not. You are lying on a mattress."

"That is not what I meant," said the Senator, "there are chickens, live chickens in this bed. There! See that one running to the foot."

"I will drive them out," said Mrs. Baldwin, who disappeared through the door and speedily returned with a broom. "Shoo, shoo," she cried, striking the bed vigorously with the household utensil.

"Stop," commanded Mallard. "Do not hurt them. They have all gone. Suebian, come nearer. I will tell thy fortune."

John advanced and held out his hand.

"No," said Mallard. "Bunglers tell fortunes by the hand. I tell them by the foot. Strip off these bandages."

The Senator stirred around uneasily, getting the quilt which was over him partly displaced, when it became apparent that he had twelve toes, six on each foot. John, while he was undoing the bandages, looked with regret at the mutilation which he had caused, and reflected that he would give much to replace the lost member in its normal state. He turned his chair toward the bed, presenting the limb with its scabbed extremity as his grandfather had desired.

"Here are the archives of the past and the indices of the future," said the statesman. "Six toes, and every toe a book. Here are Liber Primus, Liber Secundus, Liber Tertius, Liber Quartus, Liber Quintus, and, what is this? Liber Sextus is gone; dids't thou willingly part with it?"

"I would I had it back," said John earnestly.

"Liber Sextus is a grand book," said Mallard, "it tells the story of the Suebi and the Roman Usurpation. Still, I can read it when it is absent as well as when it is present. The Roman will contend against thee. Entangle him in the marshes, and remain thyself on the hills. If my head would only keep stationary, I could decipher all; but just as I am introduced to an epoch, it whirls again, and events fly out of my sight."

"He is getting tired," said Mrs. Baldwin. "We had better go and let him rest."

"Farewell, Suebian," said Mallard, when he saw them leaving his presence. "Be firm in resisting the Roman."

"Do you have watchers for him nights?" asked John as he, Mrs. Baldwin and Mrs. Boyle were in the room which contained the large picture of his grandfather.

"No," replied Mrs. Baldwin, "we did for a while, until he said so much against it. He could not bear to have any one in his room when he wanted to go to sleep. When you wish to go to bed, I will show you your room."

"I will retire now," said John.

Mrs. Baldwin led the way up the stairs to a bedroom in the north extremity of the house. Through the window John could see the glimmering lights of the wakeful city, which at the horizon appeared to join the star-dotted spread of the heavens. His happiness had come in a deluge, which he was ill-fitted quietly to withstand. There was no obstacle to his union with Manie. None could sneer at the parentage of Martin Lehmann's son and Senator Mallard's grandson. He undressed and went to bed, but the exuberance of his spirits forbade him to be still. For an hour or two he resisted the inclination to rise. Finally, however, it grew too strong to be suppressed, when he sprang up and put on his clothes. Few lights were now visible in the city. John sat in a chair, or paced back and forth until the sunbeams fell on the clustered roofs at the north.

He softly descended the stairs to take a look at his grandfather, who, he thought, might not be awake. Cautiously pushing open the bedroom door, which was ajar, he peered inside. Mallard's white face was turned toward him, the eyes were closed, the lips were parted as if in sleep, but never more would they charm a wondering senate or move to the accents of popular eloquence.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.

OF the obsequies of Senator Mallard it is necessary to say little. They were conducted with imposing ceremonies and attended by many of his associates in the Senate.

After the funeral Mrs. Boyle returned to her home. The question of heirship was some time in being satisfactorily settled. Durgenson's wife, who, as has been stated, was Mallard's niece, would not recognize John's right to the property. She and her husband lived in one part of the house, and John and Mrs. Baldwin in another.

"I tell you," said Mrs. Baldwin to John one day, "we want to look out for Durgenson. He is anxious to get you out of his way and has been ever since you were born. That night when you were at Mrs. Boyle's, I believe, just as much as I believe anything, that he meant to kill you when you went to look at the horse."

"How could he harm us?" asked John.

"By putting poison in the water we drink, or in our food," replied Mrs. Baldwin. "I tell you, John, we had better not stay in the same house with them. You don't know anything about him. He is so treacherous. You remember how he tried to get you away from us. I haven't the least doubt that he meant to lure you to some out-of-the-way place and kill you. One house is not large enough for that family and us."

"What are we to do until the estate is settled?" asked John.

"Get them out of the house, or go ourselves," answered Mrs. Baldwin.

"How can we do that?" inquired John.

"If we cannot eject them by legal process, let us leave," said Mrs. Baldwin.

“Ma'am,” said the servant-girl, appearing in some excitement, “Mrs. Durgenson told me not to dust the parlor, but to keep right out, because her girl would attend to that.”

“Which parlor?” asked Mrs. Baldwin.

“The south one,” answered the servant. “I ain't been in the north one.”

“You see,” said Mrs. Baldwin, “she is getting very bold. She commenced it the day of the funeral.”

“I will go in with you,” said John, “and we will dust that room.”

While John was dusting the furniture, he heard the querulous voice of Mrs. Durgenson, saying, “I don't mean to have them much longer in my house. Durgenson, if you had the proper spirit, you'd tell them to go. You wonder they like to stay. You're as good as pie to them all the time.”

“There isn't any use in being cranky,” said Durgenson. “You'll never make anything by that. I can't get them out without the law and we'd better wait a little.”

“Now, Durgenson, you do take things so easy,” continued the whining voice. “It ain't pleasant to have folks you don't like in your own house. You could tell 'em to go, and, if they don't go, put 'em out. You could throw that Wrengell out, couldn't you?”

“Why, yes,” replied Durgenson. “As to that, I could throw him out. I'd risk that, but there'd be an after-clap. He'd have me arrested for assault and battery right straight. I'll manage it by and by in a better way.”

“How do you mean?”

“Never you mind, Maggie. I'll attend to that. It
’t policy to use violence.”

hn had been with Mrs. Baldwin in the sitting-room
short time when the servant reappeared.
’am, the clothes is gone from the north bed-
hat is Mr. Durgenson's part of the house,” said
n.
’ the servant, “your north bedroom where
find them?” asked Mrs. Baldwin.

"No," replied the servant, "they ain't nowhere as I can see."

"I will get some clothes of my own uptown," said John. "It is as you say, Aunt Martha. We cannot live long in the same house with the Durgenson family. They will be robbing us of our cook-stove and our flour. How did they happen to live here with you?"

"They came soon after your grandfather was hurt," said Mrs. Baldwin. "They said they wanted to help take care of him. I knew they were looking after the property they expected to get. George was not in his right mind, and I could not turn them out, for Mrs. Durgenson was more nearly related to him than I. So, you see, nothing could be done. George did not fancy them, but, if he expressed an opinion, who could prove that it was anything but the raving of an insane man? They were not offensive at first, and, indeed, Mr. Durgenson has not been so any of the time. But, as soon as George died, Mrs. Durgenson began to show her disposition. None of George's nephews are living, and she, being his only niece, has always considered herself his heir. You can hardly imagine how much your appearance has disappointed her and pleased me. If my niece did die away from her kindred and in poverty, my grand-nephew is restored to me, and, I trust, will be to his rights."

"Ma'am," said the servant-girl as she again opened the door, "all the carpet upstairs is gone, and somebody's took every wash-bowl and pitcher and the looking-glasses and one of the mattresses and all the clothes on the beds.

"I will tell Durgenson to put a stop to that," said John. "I will stand it no longer."

When he inquired for Durgenson, the wife of that gentleman informed him that her husband had gone uptown.

"When will he be back?" asked John.

"I can't tell anything about it," replied Mrs. Durgenson, rolling her head to one side in a wearied manner. "I don't always ask him how long he's going to stay."

The red-headed servant-girl, who was sweeping, rolled a cloud of dust into John's face and looked cunningly at her mistress, whose countenance expressed approval of the act. John shifted his position and said, "I would like to see him as soon as he comes. In the mean time you will please leave the household articles in their present places until the settlement of the estate."

Mrs. Durgenson again tipped her head to one side, this time in defiance. The servant once more turned her broom toward John, and, suppressing a giggle, sent the dirt flying about him in profusion.

"Oh," thought John, "we have met before."

"Oblige me by telling Mr. Durgenson of my visit," he said, "and inform him that I would like to see him at the earliest opportunity."

"I ain't used to being a servant," said Mrs. Durgenson. "You'll have to see him yourself. Jule, there's some dirt in that corner."

"Yes," said Julia Wallace, filling the air with floating particles, which she energetically directed for John's inhalation.

"Good-morning," said John, passing through the door.

Mrs. Durgenson and her servant exchanged glances and tittered, and, when John had gone a few steps, burst into loud laughter.

"The idea," said Mrs. Durgenson, purposely elevating her tone so that it could be heard by her late visitor, "of a man of his birth telling me what to do with my property that my uncle left me."

The ill-feeling between the two households was shared by the servant-girls, and by them less repressed than by their employers. Usually servants have the human aversion to doing unnecessary work, but in this case the general rule was inapplicable. Both Julia and Mrs. Baldwin's Ellen were anxious to have the care of as large a share of the house as possible. The south parlor, the hall and the library were the most frequent occasions of rivalry. At the beginning of the war the girl who entered the room first was allowed undisputed possession until the renovation was completed. This tacit agreement stimulated each hurriedly to wash the morning dishes in order first to reach the contested field. Gradually they rose earlier. By Mrs. Durgenson's permission Julia, leaving her breakfast dishes unwashed, "stole a march" on the hated Ellen. Next morning the enterprising Ellen, resolved not to be beaten, swept the room before another individual in the house was astir. Slurs, innuendoes and directly personal remarks began to be used frequently by both parties.

Although Ellen had a considerable amount of fighting Irish blood, she was not as aggressive as Julia, who seemed bent on precipitating a quarrel. The encroachments on the rights of John and Mrs. Baldwin by Wallace's promising daughter, who, in truth, had more spirit than her father or her brother, were annoying in the extreme. She came to Ellen's kitchen and helped herself to a panful of flour, saying that the Durgenson supply was exhausted and she had as much right to this as Ellen, because Mrs. Durgenson's uncle had bought it. She carried away the entire stock of pear preserves, for Mrs. Durgenson liked pear preserves, and not a single can had been provided her. She took Ellen's good broom and left an old one in its place. The kitchen where she worked had bad cracks in the floor, and no old stub could dig them out. The chamber in the wing which Mrs. Baldwin had reserved for the use of herself and John was steadily stripped of its belongings. Fruit cans, dishes, bedding and pictures disappeared, some secretly, some openly, into the rooms allotted to the Durgensons. The crisis came when Julia called after a kettle which Ellen had used since the beginning of her service.

"I can't spare that," said Ellen. "It's all the one I've got like it."

"You can if you have to, I guess," remarked Julia. "I've got to have it, because the big kettle I use don't fit on the stove good."

"You're a-getting everything," said Ellen. "Don't you want the stove and my table?"

"Yes," replied Julia, "I'm a-going to have 'em before long, too, but I shan't use the stove, because mine is better. You'll have to be getting out of here before long. Mrs. Durgenson says so."

"I guess I shan't," screamed Ellen, grasping the kettle and putting it behind her. "I'm a-going to stay right here. When you get Mr. Lehmann out of this house, you'll know it."

"I'll know it about next week," retorted Julia, bobbing her head furiously and approaching Ellen, who backed away with the kettle. "There ain't any Mr. Lehmann here. That's John Wrengell, and he's a nobody. He stole a horse and got chased out of Break o' Day. He come to see me once. I told him to keep right away, for I wouldn't have anything to do with him,—the scurf o' the earth. I'd like to claw him."

"I don't believe it," returned Ellen. "He wouldn't look at you, nor the likes of you, you great freckled thing. You've stole everything you could get your hands on, and I know you'd lie, too."

"You miserable Irish amount-to-nothing," cried Julia, advancing toward her, "you want to shut right up. Hand me that kettle in a hurry."

"What is all this about?" asked Mrs. Baldwin, coming to the relief of the frightened Ellen.

"She won't let me have that kettle," said Julia, "and I'm a-going to have it. I ain't got a big kettle that fits my cook-stove."

"We cannot spare that kettle," said Mrs. Baldwin. "You must get along the best way you can."

"I ain't afraid of you both," said Julia. "Hand that kettle here."

"Get out of this kitchen, or I will have you arrested," said John, suddenly appearing. "You have taken things enough. I warn you not to molest this part of the house."

"Oh, you low-lived galoot," said Julia, as she took her departure, "I guess I'm as respectable as the Wrengells. There never was a decent one amongst you. I've heard all about your tribe, you son of a thief. Mrs. Durgenson'll have you out of here in a week."

"Durgenson has avoided me for several days," said John to Mrs. Baldwin. "I must see him and put a stop to these annoyances. I would rather talk to him than to the women. They always get the advantage of me."

As he was passing the library in pursuance of his intention, he heard steps inside. Peering in, he saw Mrs. Durgenson standing on a chair in the act of tearing off the scraps which Mallard had pasted on the walls. These clippings, which were very valuable to political and biographical students, he prized especially because they had been arranged by his grandfather's hand. Such a desecration of his venerated ancestor's memory filled John with indignation, and he was quick to show his displeasure.

" Mrs. Durgenson," he said, " I cannot allow that paper to be torn off. It was pasted there by my grandfather, and there it must stay, at least until the court decides against my claim."

"Why, this is my house," said Mrs. Durgenson, beginning to cry. " It's a pity if I can't do what I want to in my own house." As she spoke she tore from the wall a strip of paper, which fell to the floor.

" You must leave this room immediately," said John.

"You'll get yourself into trouble," said the angry woman, sobbing violently. " There'll be somebody after you. I'll tell Durgenson of this, and he'll fight you. He can do it."

" Tell him to come now," said John. " I will wait here in the library for him."

" Oh, Durgenson," wailed the wife, as she came into the presence of her husband, " I've been insulted in my own house."

" Who's been insulting you ? " asked Durgenson.

" It's that low-bred Wrengell," replied Mrs. Durgenson between her sobs. " The library looks awful with those dirty papers on. I wanted to tear 'em off and fix it decent. He—he wouldn't let me. Oh, Durgenson will you let the wife of your bosom be insulted in her own house ? "

" Now, wife of my bosom," said Durgenson, with a smile, " you get insulted very easy. In the first place, you hadn't ought to have been in there tearing off the paper, and in the next place, when he told you to go, you ought to have gone without a word."

" I never thought that of you, Durgenson," whimpered the wife. " You take up sides with him."

" Pshaw, now," said Durgenson, " if he had really insulted you, I would whip that paper off the wall with him. But, if I should pound him without any cause, it would hurt our claim to the estate. Just let me tell you, Maggie. Let him work and have it his own way for a while. What do we care if the paper stays on a week or two? And I wouldn't have the girl snake away any more quilts or truck from their part of the house."

"I can't be so spiritless," said Mrs. Durgenson. "It ain't natural for me. I can't bear to have that jail-bird around. Only think of it, what a low descent! We know the pedigree of the Wrengells."

"I'll admit all that," said Durgenson, lowering his voice, "but come here, Maggie. This is confidential, you know. It mustn't be lisped, even to the girl. We can get the start of him better to have him think we're friendly. Between you and me, he's got strong testimony to back his claim. No matter if it's false, it will count all the same in law. There isn't any doubt in my mind but what he'll get it."

"And we can't have Uncle George's property?" asked Mrs. Durgenson, again beginning to cry.

"Not unless we're lucky or mighty sharp," said Durgenson. "Don't cry your eyes out, Maggie. Something may turn up for us yet. He may go out in a rain-storm and catch his death of cold, or the cars may run over him, or he may eat too many vegetables and get downed by the colic."

"I don't just want him to die," said Mrs. Durgenson.

"No, nor I," said Durgenson, "but, if he does, we can't help it. We didn't want your Uncle George to die. He did, though, and we wouldn't have any objection to taking the property. Our chances are a good deal better if we can stay right here. So, you see, we better not quarrel with him, not stir him up to push his claim very fast."

"He said he wanted to see you in the library," said Mrs. Durgenson.

"I'd better go, too," said Durgenson. "I'll smooth matters over. And, Maggie, tell Jule not to quarrel any more with that girl in the south part. She'll be scratching her eyes out the next thing we hear."

"Durgenson, I have been wishing to see you for a week," was John's greeting. "For some reason you have avoided me."

"Oh, no, not a bit of it," said the cattle-buyer, stroking his well-trimmed beard with what seemed the essence of good-nature. "What can I do for you?"

"Keep your wife and your servant in your own part of the house," said John. "They come to this part and take everything they can find. I have endured it for a long time, because I disliked to speak to them about the matter and you have kept out of my way. I have stood it as long as I will."

"I'm sorry about that," said Durgenson. "It must be the girl. The women, you know, have got to sputter around and quarrel anyway. We hadn't ought to mind them. You and I can't afford to have a falling out just because the women don't agree."

"That talk sounds very well," replied John. "It does not, however, make up for the loss of household articles which are necessities."

"What have you missed?" inquired Durgenson.

"Too many things for enumeration," replied John. "Never mind what has been taken. If the evil is stopped now, I shall be satisfied."

"But I shan't be satisfied," said Durgenson. "Make out a list of what is missing, and I will bring them back, or pay you for them."

"I will take no pay for them," said John, ashamed that he had spoken harshly to a man who was so willing to rectify a wrong which he did not perpetrate.

"Yes," said Durgenson, "that is no more than square. Now, Wrengell, or Lehmann (excuse me, I didn't think), why don't you lock up these rooms? You know what women folks are. It may bother me to keep them within bounds."

"The keys are missing," replied John. "We have not seen them since last Tuesday."

"I wonder if that Jule has got them," remarked Durgenson. "I saw some keys hanging up in the sitting-room. Stay here a minute till I look." He very shortly returned with a bunch of keys.

"Those are the ones," said John. "Keep those which belong to your part of the house."

"I don't care anything about them," said Durgenson.

"I was thinking about your claim to-day. It looks plausible enough, so that it may make us a good deal of trouble. That Dabney would swear to a lie as quick as he'd yarn it about his salves and dopes. What will you take for your interest here, Lehmann?"

"I do not care to dispose of it," replied John. "I had rather have my honorable lineage acknowledged than to possess all the real estate in Lansing without the respectable lineage. If I sell out, it will look like a confession that I am an impostor."

"What will you give us for our interest?" asked Durgenson. "A lawsuit would be apt to eat a hole in what Uncle George earned."

"I will not give very much," answered John, "not more than five thousand dollars."

"That is pretty small," said Durgenson, "considering the amount of the property. Give me a little time to think it over, Lehmann."

Durgenson, seemingly in the best of humor, went to his sitting-room. Half an hour after their conversation John was passing through the hall when he heard a strange voice saying in the adjacent parlor, "There's no use of being worried about this matter, Mrs. Durgenson. It's my duty to take him with me and I shall have to. If I could help it, I would."

"Oh, Durgenson," wailed the wife, "you're going to leave your Maggie! Oh, Durgenson, dear, when will you be back?"

"Before a great while," responded Durgenson cheeringly. "I haven't hired anybody to steal horses. Some thieves killed a man in Illinois when he tried to stop them from taking his horse. I'm not responsible for it, and I can prove it. Can I speak a minute with my wife?"

"Talk away," said the officer, for the man was, indeed, a minion of the law. "Go to that side of the room if you want to, but I can't let you go out of my sight."

The reader, if he chooses, may peruse the whispered consultation, which was unintelligible to the officer and to John.

"Maggie," said Durgenson, "Lehmann has got us foul. He'll have this estate as sure as we're standing here. He has offered us five thousand to give up our claim. It isn't much, but you had better take it."

"We ought to see if we can't get something more," said Mrs. Durgenson.

"No," said Durgenson; "if we do, some disagreeable things will be brought up in court. We will lose the five thousand dollars and pay out besides. I did play sharp with him when he was a kid, Maggie, and we don't want it talked about much. Sign off your interest for what he offers."

"I'll have to interrupt you," said the officer. "Come on."

"Hadn't you better stay to dinner?" asked Durgenson. "We'll have it ready in a little while."

"No," said the officer, "I can't wait at all. It's nearly time for the train. Get on your hat now."

"Oh, don't take him! Don't take my Hiram!" pleaded Mrs. Durgenson, throwing her arms about her husband. "I can't live without him."

"Oh, yes, you can," said the officer, motioning Durgenson to go with him. "You'll flourish all right."

With many tears and apostrophic declarations of love Mrs. Durgenson bade farewell to her husband, who, in apparently good spirits, set out for Chicago to face the charge which had been brought against him.

Mrs. Baldwin was rejoiced at the removal of the great danger which, she said, had threatened them. She was not afraid of poison when Durgenson was in jail. Mrs. Durgenson, accepting her husband's advice, signed away her interest in the property for the five thousand dollars which was offered her. At her departure she took away large quantities of household goods as souvenirs of her Uncle George.

In a short time John was in undisputed possession of the Mallard estate. He longed to hear specific news from the Ratke neighborhood. The several letters which he addressed to Manie were signed John and brought him no answer. He did not reflect that his correspondent might be ignorant or forgetful of the recent change in his name.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VERDURE RISING FROM THE ASHES.

THE day following the frustrated attempt at suicide in the blacksmith shop Ratke relapsed into his accustomed reticence. He was too weak and lame for bodily labor and too much dejected to talk. "The senility of age is upon me," he said, when Manie had asked him to perfect the churn, the invention of which he had contemplated before the loss of his property.

It was not until the next morning that he regained anything like the cheerfulness which had been once his habitual mood. As he walked through the small enclosure which had served the blacksmith as a garden, he saw a maple tree, some of whose leaves the frosts of fall had dyed with red. "In the midst of certain evils," he mused, "the human family is like the leaves of that tree; the more prominent ones are first touched by the frost of misfortune. Phleet Takum, the Wallaces and my hired men are all proof against what I have suffered." The reflection, mournful as it was, consoled him greatly, for it proved that his habit of philosophical thought, which he had believed dead, had only slept. He remembered the prospect of which Manie had spoken, that he and she together could pursue the studies which he loved. He felt that his powers were returning to him, and that it would be a delight once more to apply them where Nature had amplified their scope.

He went slowly back to the house. The open door revealed the figure of a man who was sitting in a rocking-chair.

"John," said the major, cordially greeting his former hired man, "how did you come?"

"I drove out with my team," replied John.

"I thought you had forgotten us since you met with your good fortune," said the major.

"No," replied John, "I have thought of you every day, Major. I have had a great deal of business to attend to, or I should have been here sooner. Would you like to take a ride with me? I mean all of you."

"I do not care for pleasure now," said the major sadly. "I shall never be myself again, John. Bitterness is my portion the remainder of my days. Still, I will go with you."

"I'd like a ride," said Mrs. Grippin. "I've had to foot it ever since we lived here. Where is your team?"

"Behind the blacksmith shop," replied John.

"What in the world!" exclaimed Mrs. Grippin, as they came around the corner of the shop.

Her exclamation was caused by a perfect model of the New Jerusalem, before which stood the major's favorite team, Taylor and Bill. The major said not a word. He eyed with admiration the New Jerusalem, its spotless paint, the make of its wheels and its superior ironing. One after another, he picked up the wheels and revolved them. A single noticeable attribute of the old vehicle was missing, the wailing squeak of the left hind wheel. The major went to the horses' heads. He patted alternately the noses of Taylor and Bill. He went back to the wagon, lifted the wheels, examined the irons and returned to the noses of the team. His actions were like those of a small boy who hardly knows on which of several attractions to bestow his notice.

"I beg of you to accept the team and wagon," said John. "I wish to make a slight present to the old friend who gave me the first social recognition I ever knew."

The major turned his back to the group and stood silent for a moment.

"Come, James," said Mrs. Grippin sharply, "we're waiting for a ride."

Ratke, clambering into the front box, at John's request took the lines.

"Where did you get this wagon?" asked Mrs. Grippin.

"I got the model of Phelps," replied John, "and had it made in Jackson."

"There's that patent-medicine man," said Mrs. Grippin, who had been prevented by her low position from sooner observing the pedestrian.

"You are just the man I want to see, Major," said Panicky as Ratke stopped. "No, drive right along, I'll climb in behind. Why, Lehmann," he exclaimed, seating himself on the end-board, "you're out here, are you? You can't tell who's who when you're ahead of this kind of a wagon. I never saw one like it before. What kind of a thing is it?"

"It is a wagon," said John, "a new kind."

"Gosh!" remarked Panicky, "I should think it was a new kind. Where did you get the concern?"

"Sir," said the major, turning suddenly around, "I am the inventor of this wagon."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," stammered Panicky. "It's a blamed nice thing and I know it. Anybody with half an eye can see that. Is your health pretty good, Mrs. Grippin?" he inquired at the end of an embarrassing lull in the conversation.

"Yes," said Mrs. Grippin, "I don't want to buy any medicine."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking about that," Panicky protested. "It has been a very sickly time and my stock of medicine is almost out. I can't spare any except in extreme cases. There's fever and ague and summer-complaint and hay-fever, all running at once. It's, 'Dabney, I want some panacea,' 'Dabney, give me another bottle of that,' 'Dabney, my family's lost without the panacea.' Yesterday a man that had cut his thumb threatened to prosecute me. I told him there was others that needed it worse than he did."

"What's the use of lying so?" said Mrs. Grippin in disgust.

There was a sound of rapid steps over the hard road which stretched toward the church, and Sparks, with his recovered Madge T., drove alongside the New Jerusalem. Without slackening his speed he looked at Ratke, wondering how in his poverty he could again drive his queer equipage.

"Bought 'em back, have you, Major?" he called, as he whisked triumphantly by.

"Charge!" cried the major.

The horses, remembering their education, instantly sprang forward. Ratke maintained his balance. Mrs. Grippin, Manie and John were thrown to the bottom of the respective boxes which they occupied, while Panicky was precipitated on his head in a puddle of water, with his heels pointing upward and his satchels following him in his descent. The gray Bill ran as usual, but Taylor after the first jump surprised Ratke by settling down to a trot which brought him steadily nearer the wheel of Sparks's sulky.

"By George!" cried the major, in great excitement, rising to his feet and with his whip extended, standing like a picture of an ancient warrior on a chariot brandishing a spear. "Look at him throw out his forefeet! Here's the race you wanted, Sparks. Look out, I'm going by!" he yelled as Madge T., seeing that she was losing ground, raised both her forefeet in the air at once. "Where's your fine-blooded Madge? What do you think of Wellington stock now, Sparks?"

Ratke was still erect and still swinging his whip. His hat had blown off, and his hair, which was several inches long, stood out horizontally in the rush of air occasioned by their speed. Madge's break hastened her defeat, which, had she maintained her practiced gait, she could not have avoided; and her nose was in a short time behind the rear box of Ratke's wagon.

"James," screamed Mrs. Grippin, clutching the box, "you act crazy. Quit your driving so fast!"

"All right, Maria. Shall I let him go by?" said Ratke, who knew that Mrs. Grippin would be as averse as he to the triumph of Sparks.

"Oh, do just as you want to," replied Mrs. Grippin in a resigned manner. "You will any way."

"Step along there, Taylor!" sang the major with another flourish of his whip. "Get down to it, boy! Steady now."

"Let us stop here," said John, as they neared Ratke's old homestead.

Sparks was walking his horse that he might not seem to be an unsuccessful contestant of the race. Panicky mudded and disconsolate, was with his satchels trudging along in the rear.

The owner of the farm evidently had a desire, to bring it as near as possible to its former aspect, for the buildings were constructed after the model of those which were burned. The three barns partly enclosed the same rectangle, which was completed by the connecting fence, but the cock on the central one was smaller, and his comb less prominent. No change was visible in the tool-house. Aside from the newness of its green paint, the club-house, which, surmounted by a cupola, was particularly neat, had sustained but one noticeable alteration, the ornamentation and protection by a triple-pointed, instead of a single-pointed, lightning-rod. The Gothic house with its three sharp gables was as of old, except that it looked as if it had been immersed in the fountain of youth, which had given it new shingles, new chimneys and door-knobs, had brightened the exterior of its walls and covered its paintless spots. The saddest and only irremediable injury which had been wrought was among the spruce trees, the shriveled and blackened branches of which were mournful reminders of the once thrifty grove. Those nearest the house were limbless. Those farther on had dusky, bare arms. Still nearer the road were the leaves which had been left and which varied in color from reddish-brown to green, according to their distance from the flames by which they had been scorched. Through the desolation the house showed with a distinctness, which brought vividly to the minds of those who had frequented the place the catastrophe so destructive to its luxuriant screen.

" Are you going into the yard ? " asked Ratke.

" Yes," answered John, " we may as well look around."

In advance of the Ratkes, he went up the steps, unlocked the sitting-room door and opened it.

" I would not do that," protested the major. " Gower would not like it, if he knew it. I heard Durgenson had sold it to him."

" I have his permission to go through the house," said John.

The major hesitated no longer. " He has been in

Jackson these dozen years. I hardly thought he would want to live here. Let us go into the parlor."

In the parlor were four bookcases closely resembling those the loss of which the major had sustained, and they held many of the works which it had been his wont to study. He could not resist opening them and examining their contents.

"Here is a Tractacus de Veritate," he cried. "I never saw but two copies of it before. One of them your grandfather had." He busied himself with the book, while Mrs. Grippin was in another part of the house and John and Manie, sitting on the sofa, conversed in low tones.

"I can disprove that line of argument," he said, putting down the open volume. "Lord Herbert has made it very easy for his guard to be beaten down in that passage."

"I have a paper for you to examine," said John, extending a document, which the major seized. The paper was the deed which Ratke had given Durgenson of his farm. The major read it, put it into his pocket and walked out of doors.

"How is that?" asked Mrs. Grippin, who had looked over her brother's shoulder. "How did you get that deed?"

"The major has not yet lost his place," replied John. "The bond and deed were only a continuation of the mortgage. I paid Durgenson the indebtedness and he gave me the deed. He had made a verbal agreement with Mr. Gower to sell the place at the expiration of the year allowed by the law for redemption. But he could not give a deed until after the sheriff's sale of the property. I acquainted Mr. Gower with the circumstances, and I induced him to have these buildings erected at my expense. I was confident that the major would not prosecute me for trespass. The bond and deed are not commonly well understood. I consulted Fellows, the best lawyer in Lansing, and he told me that many a man who had given a deed and taken a bond had lost his property, because he did not understand that those legal instruments are but extensions of mortgages."

When the major returned, he was whittling some pieces of pine.

"I have the plan of it, Manie," he said, "a plan which must be successful."

"A plan of what?" asked Manie.

"Why, of the churn, to be sure," said Ratke. "What did you think I meant? You see the dasher is fixed so as to revolve. Loose as it is, it will turn, of course, in the direction which offers the least resistance; and the twisting shape of the paddles makes it incline downward and to one side when a downward stroke is given, and upward and to one side when an upward stroke is given. As it goes downward, the cream is whirled one way; as it goes upward, it is whirled the other way. This gives an alternate rotary motion, all the benefits of the swing churn without the tedious labor of working it. The quick change in the circular motion is of special advantage. The preservation of the butter grain and its speedy gathering is a combination of results which will make my churn ahead of anything yet invented."

After the delivery of this speech the major went into the front yard, proceeded to the rear of the house and directed his steps toward the grubs. At the left Daggett and Brown were husking corn with the utmost speed. Archer, apparently forsaken by his habit of laziness, was maintaining a still swifter gait. Steady Jack Sheppard, who never hurried, who never failed to do a good day's work, was throwing out the ears at a uniform rate without looking up, to the right, or to the left.

The major sought the seclusion of the grubs, where he sat on a decayed log, meditating on the recent change in his mood from suicidal despair to joyous serenity. In his possession were the two-and-one-half sections, the fields, woods and swamp which had been dear to him in the prime of manhood and were dearer yet in his old age. As he stepped from the grubs, how complete seemed the restoration of his fortunes. The view, save the ruin of the trees, was as it had been. In the swamp, much of which had been protected by standing water or the dampness of the ground, the course of the fire was plainly marked. Ratke looked with such satisfaction as he never had previously felt in the contemplation of his estate, on the brown woods, the shocked corn, and the new wheat, which was thick and promising. Jake was husking corn exactly as he had been when Ratke entered the grubs. Daggett and Brown were still energetically working. Archer's hands, however, were moving very slowly, and he was beginning a monotonous chant:

"Oh, horrible it is to relate,
The tale I have to tell,
About the cruel and hard fate.
That a young maid befell."

A noisy barking and yelping fell on Ratke's ear. Philetus was dogging away from the vicinity of his house a herd of cattle, among which were surely several former tenants of the place.

"How natural that seems," thought the major. "He must stay, for it would not seem like the old farm without him."

The clanging of the upright saw, elicited by the vigorous hammering of Mrs. Grippin, announced that dinner was ready. Archer, Brown and Daggett came to the house together, Daggett joking in his usual way, while Jake followed them. At dinner it was plain to the major that two things to complete the restoration of the ancient state of affairs were lacking, the coarse repartee of the hands, who, as they entered the house, ceased their boisterous remarks, and the sharp criticism of Mrs. Grippin, who would not gratify him by a caustic speech. He wished that Daggett would anger her by a joke, or that Archer would fire her wrath by digging an ugly hollow in the butter, but neither hope was realized.

After dinner Ratke sauntered to the tool-house, where he found the New Jerusalem, his one-man saw and a large quantity of irons. He wondered where such a variety of old wheels, bars, pinions and cranks had been collected.

When he returned to the house and entered the parlor, John, who had been sitting on the sofa with Manie, moved suddenly away from her.

"It has been my misfortune," said the major, "to destroy one of Nature's forces."

"Is that so?" asked John, "how can you destroy a force in Nature?"

"I misspoke myself," said Ratke. "I merely changed its application."

"How did you change its application?" inquired John.

"Gravity decreases," said the major, "as the square of the distance increases. The absolute force of a center of attraction is the intensity of force of attraction at a point multiplied by the square of the distance, which equals L cube divided by T square. When I came into this room, you were so close to Manie that the distance between you was incalculable. Now you are at least a yard away from her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

STRAY LOCALS.

Of the six correspondents who contribute to the "Sharptown Sun," an influential paper with a circulation of more than 500 copies, I am by the editor considered second in merit. He told me confidentially that, although perhaps two of my brother scribes excel me in style, not one of them has as keen an instinct for news as I. This indisputable excellence in newspaper work, an excellence which is shown by my connection with the Sun for three years, induces me to arrange some of the latter part of this history in the form of a correspondence.

Alf Boyle was killed while resisting the officers who were sent to arrest him.

Mrs. Boyle, refusing to change her place of abode, continued her ministrations from her home in the wood. Sick people, needy children and her sabbath-school class received her special attention.

Hiram B. Durgenson will not again defraud the farmers. He was convicted of being accessory to the murder of William Boyce, an Illinois farmer, and sentenced to the Joliet prison, where, two years later, he died.

A watch was placed on Julia Wallace's movements. She was observed to take water to the barn at night. Her watchers, concealing themselves in the mow, saw her open a trap-door covered with hay and descend to the excavation which had been made in the spring. With a lantern, which they procured after her departure, they explored the underground stable. At first they thought they had discovered the recently-stolen horse, but a nearer approach showed them that this one was light, and the one for which they were looking had been dark. The next day, summoning a crowd, they returned to the barn. The victim of the late theft said that in size and form this animal was exactly like his Prince, but Prince was not of a dirty mouse color. A peculiar whinny and a pawing of the beast for grain settled his doubt at once. He was quite certain that the lost was found. In the stable where a huge rubber blanket, some bottles and papers containing chemicals, and a kettle in which some substance had been burned. The riddle was laid before some doctors and druggists, who declared it to be their belief that the horse had been covered with the rubber blanket, the chemicals burned under him and his color changed by the imprisoned smoke. A jury decided that Wallace and Ab were guilty of horse-stealing, but Julia was allowed to go unmolested.

Nora's grief over the fate of Montcalm, though sincere, was not of very great duration. In one of her visits to her Michigan relatives she met Fred Loomis, whose attentions she received and whom she subsequently wedded.

Ratke's men, who believed they had contributed to his great disaster, which was now repaired, worked with tolerable faithfulness, but Brown and Archer would occasionally shirk duty. The major's churn, to the astonishment of every one except the philosopher, proved a success. Its proceeds enabled him to repay John for the liquidation of the mortgage, an act which, in the face of the most vehement protests, he insisted on performing.

An evangelist came to Break o' Day, and Philetus Takum was converted. Philetus remained a devotee of his faith, until Lyman Sparks procured a superior breed of cochins with immense thighs and full breasts, when he yielded to the tempter. He was one of those who received the word on stony ground.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN THE ORCHARD AGAIN.

AMONG the many advantages which fiction, history and recollection have over present reality one is that they make time their servant. I have in a few paragraphs sketched events which were several years in occurring; and I have purposely omitted many details, the narration of which would have been laborious to me and the perusal of which would have been tedious to the reader. It was in October that Ratke regained possession of his farm, It was in the following May that the closing scenes of my story occurred.

The warm spring night was a continuation of twilight. There was mirth in the club-house, from which at intervals came the sound of dancing and of a violin. All the hired men of the previous year were there, for they were fond of frequent reunions. Daggett, whose zest for practical jokes seemed unbounded, had inherited from his grandfather a silk tile, which was very tall and very old. This worn-out hat he had by using much flattery sold to Archer and had induced him to wear it to Break o' Day, where it and its owner were greeted with yells of derision. The defrauded purchaser on his return discovered that ink had been secreted in the lining in such a manner that it had dripped down and streaked his face with red. Daggett was saved from a chastisement by the interference of the men, who had much trouble in holding the infuriated Archer.

The major was in the tool-house whittling, tinkering and philosophizing to his heart's content. He had removed his coat and vest and his face was animated with interest. On the floor were many pieces of newly whittled wood and many cast irons. He was holding in an upright position an S-shaped bar about his own height, which he was giving the last few touches with his jack-knife

"This will greatly increase the modulus of the machine," remarked the old man to himself, as he surveyed his work. "This saves the use of one wheel and cog. Unless I am mistaken, it will strike the bar exactly on the center of percussion."

John and Manie, who had been married the preceding winter, and who lived at Lansing, were sitting in the parlor of the new dwelling, with their chairs touching each other and Manie's hand resting on his shoulder. The door leading to the sitting-room was opened by Mrs. Grippin, who thrust her head inside the parlor.

"Why don't you folks have a light?" she said sharply. "Sitting there in the dark when there ain't any need of it, just as though we didn't have money enough to buy kerosene."

"We have thought nothing about the light," replied John.

"Just as you like," said Mrs. Grippin, as she closed the door. "Set in the dark like heathens if you want to. Some folks are so funny about such things."

"How little we are talking," remarked John. "Do you not feel lonely in so dull society?"

"No, not in the least," answered Manie. "I am never lonely except when I am with one whom I wish to entertain, but who has no concern for things in which I am interested. Left without interruption to my own reflections, I am quite capable of self-entertainment."

"My tongue has been inactive to-night," said John, "but my thoughts have been busy. I have been thinking of last summer when I sat in this room, or its counterpart, and conducted a suit which, to tell the truth, I had no reasonable chance to win."

"So you call those visits a courtship, do you?" asked Manie, with a smile which the darkness concealed, though it could not hide the raillery expressed in her voice and words. "Your main care seemed to be to keep me from knowing your real sentiments, but I readily guessed them from the first in spite of all your precautions."

"Yes," admitted John, "I was afraid to make known my longing. While I was in uncertainty, I had hope; but I did not know how unhappy I might be when doubt was dispelled. My sex frequently offends by an excess of presumption."

"The most frequent offenses," replied Manie, "are caused by a lack of presumption, although the grossest are caused by its excess."

"That is a strange and questionable theory," replied John.

"Do you think so?" said Manie. "I know a dozen young men who are kept by timidity from enjoying the society of ladies whom they admire. Their addresses, which would be welcomed, are long deferred. They worship at a distance; and by and by, when they summon up their laggard courage and are repulsed, they do not mistrust that their offers are declined only because they are proffered too late. The ladies, whose attractions are appreciated by other admirers, look with scorn on the tardy advances."

"Now, my little philosopher," said John, "you are, as ever, argumentative. To-night I am too happy for controversy. I feel like dreaming rather than arguing. Come into the orchard with me, Manie."

Silently they passed to the orchard. The sky was almost cloudless and was brilliantly lighted by its thousand lamps. They seated themselves at the foot of a tree and reclined against its trunk. It was with a feeling of security that Manie let her head drop on his shoulder. As far as man could love, as far as man could cherish, as far as man could protect, he would "love, cherish and protect." She had given him her heart when he was poor in money and in position. Now the poor had become rich, the despised had become honored, the weak had become strong.

They looked long at the fragments of apple-blossoms which were dropping in the moonlight. One other May they had been in that orchard, aye, under that very tree, and had marked the beauty of the sight, a beauty enhanced by the manifold augmentation of fancy. How vividly they remembered that Sabbath morning. Nor could they forget that night when, almost in the same place, in the net-work of moonbeams which came between the apple limbs, they had uttered their first words of love.

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THE END.

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